Black Workers and Politics in Martinique

1870-1900

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (by Research)

Glwadys Le Goff

School of Art and Education

Middlesex University

September 2009

Abstract

All Martiniquans became citizens when the Third Republic was proclaimed in 1870. As freedom, equality and fraternity were the Republican values, black and coloured people became free to upward their social mobility and to be involved in politics as were white Martiniquans. Coloured people managed to be totally involved in politics. Representing the Republican Party, they became white people's enemies. The Martiniquan political life — full of passion, conflict and controversy — started in the 1870s. The history of Martinique politics is a topic which has been developed many times by historians. However, black people seemed to have been excluded from this history. This gives the impression that black people were not involved in any kind of political activities and any form of politics. In addition, they seemed to occupy the same position in the Martiniquan society: the former slave one. The aim of this dissertation is then to contradict the idea that black people were not interested in politics. By demonstrating black people's process of integration in the Martiniquan society and politics, we will show that, in spite of the limits set by the colonial and capitalist system, they were involved in a politics related to their working class position. This politics was different but related to the mainstream politics white and coloured people were involved in. Black people's political instruments were different from those used in mainstream politics. However, black workers' politics had the power to affect mainstream politics and election. Their consciousness of the power their social class gave them was the first step of their working class movement. The issue of this writing is then to demonstrate how black people evolved from slaves to workers aware of their social class.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank many people who helped me with this dissertation. Their patience, trust, advices and encouragements gave me the desire to keep working and not to give up.

First of all, I would like to thank my tutors: Raynalle Udris and, especially Hakim Adi. I would like to thank him for all his support and advices. Without him, I would not have found the right direction for this work.

I am also grateful to my parents who have always believed in me, supported me and encouraged me to carry on with my studies.

I am thankful to some of my friends for their help and their support.

Thank you to Lucien Polénor too. I met him while I was doing some researches in the Archives. He helped me to understand politics in Martinique and gave me lots of pieces of information on the topic. In the same way, I thank all the nice people I met during my researches who received me and helped me.

Lastly I would like to thank Middlesex University which allowed me to finish my studies and do this dissertation.

Contents

Introduction

The proclamations of both the abolition of slavery in 1848 and the Third Republic in 1870 were important in Martinique history. In addition to freedom, all servile men obtain the status of citizen. Therefore, in 1848 and from 1870, every man aged twenty-one and over, had the right to vote. This marked the beginning of the colony's electoral life. Between 1849 and 1851, people in Martinique were called many times to choose and vote for their deputies. This was the first time, in 1849 that the male universal suffrage was used in the colony. But the era of citizenship did not last long as the Napoleonic Second Empire, which started in 1852, deprived black and coloured people from all their rights. Universal suffrage was removed and only white people were representing the Napoleonic government in the colony. However, in 1870, as soon as Napoleon was defeated, the Republic returned and male universal suffrage was reinstated in Martinique. This marked the beginning of the real political and electoral life of Martinique, as no other regime dismissed the universal suffrage again. However, people in Martinique were not affected by this new empowerment in the same way. The Martiniquan society was divided in different ethnic and skin colour groups. These groups had different appreciations for politics and elections. Before focusing on how people were affected by politics, let's first introduce the different social groups that compounded Martinique's population in 1870.

As a former slave colony, there were whites, blacks but also mixed-race people in Martinique in 1870. In addition to this mixed population were immigrant workers coming from India or China. According to Souquet-Basiège,

> "The narrow land of the French West Indies is shared between three races: Europeans, white people constantly recruited from mainland France or descending from the families who successively settled in the colony; black people, imported from Africa for a while, but almost all were born in the Antilles today; and stepping from these two races, an intermediate one, usually referred to as Mulâtre, Métis, Quarterons."[1]

There was the same social hierarchy in the colony in 1870 as in slavery. Whites were at the top of the social ladder, while blacks were at the bottom. Starting from the top, white people were the most powerful and wealthiest group of Martinique's society during slavery. Owning all the sugar cane plantations, these colons shared the colony's economy between themselves. After 1848, they remained in the same position as they were still financially and economically powerful. The only difference was that they had not a master status anymore, but an employer one. The white wealthy families, forming the *plantocracy* of the colony, were the most powerful people. They were called *Békés*[2] by the locals. Nonetheless, all the whites were not *Békés*. There were also among white people, some coming from France or Europe for temporary work in the colonial administration or in the Navy. Additionally, there was a group that we could call *petits blancs* — these people were not as wealthy as *Békés* but they usually had good positions, and were also considered as superior to the coloured and black population. In short, there were different types of white people. They formed a very small community of approximately five thousand people over a global population of 203,781 inhabitants in 1900[3]. Even if they were numerically inferior they were still financially and economically powerful. They also had influence in politics, especially during the Second Empire.

[1] G. Souquet-Basiège, (1883) *Le Préjugé de race aux Antilles Françaises* (Désormeaux), p.9

[2] This term is still used today in Martinique and Guadeloupe as it still refers to wealthy white Creoles families. They are all descendants of the former families of planters. We will then use this expression when talking about this group of persons in this thesis.

[3] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Vol.2* (l'Harmattan, 1996) p.151

Occupying the position of employers, their main priority after the abolition of slavery was to keep black workers in the fields. They succeeded in maintaining the black labour force on plantations, as many laws were passed in collaboration with the Napoleonic government in order to force the newly freed blacks to keep their working positions. Yet, they felt disadvantaged in politics during the Third Republic. Considering themselves superior to the other races, they did not welcome the Third Republic which put them on the same citizenship level as coloured and black people. They had little support during the electoral campaigns and the elections of the Third Republic. They partially lost their power in politics over coloured people, but were still involved in the colony's political matters as far as the island's economy and industry were concerned. It is important to bear in mind that white people had complete control over Martinique's economy and industry. At the beginning of the Third Republic, there were serious coloured people's opponents in politics, and they encountered difficulties to gain voters' consideration. According to Camille Darsières they stayed generally out of the political scene, even if some presented themselves in elections, until the 1890s[4] when socialism appeared in Guadeloupe[5]. They made various political alliances with coloured people afterwards to form political parties forgetting the colour line and focusing on their political interests.

The coloured group appeared during slavery. Indeed, these people are descendants of the *affranchis*, of the manumitted people. Also referred as *gens de couleur*[6], most of coloured people were born from the union of black and white individuals. They were called *Mulâtres*[7] or *Métis* by the locals. Hearn defined a coloured person as someone "in whom the predominant element is white".[8] This means that a coloured person is a mixed-race person who looks more like a white than a black person.

[4] C ; Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière, Socialiste Colonial, Les années pures, 1872-1919* (Editions Désormeaux, 1995), p.33

[5] Socialism appeared in Guadeloupe in the 1890s with a black leader called Hégésippe Légitimus, as we will see later in the dissertation. C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…. p.36

[6] Garaud, *Trois Ans à la Martinique* (1895) p. 191

[7] The term *Mulâtre* is common in Martinique. It is used to name mixed from black and white parentage.

[8] L. Hearn, (1889) *Two Years in the French West Indies* (The Echo Library, 2006) p. 181

Because of their non-slave status in the Nineteenth Century, they had easier access to education than black people. Hence, most of them were educated. They wanted to be recognized as equal to white people, and when the Republic was proclaimed, they did not hesitate to confront white people in politics. This was their chance to gain power, respect and eventually be recognized as a group of the *Martiniquan* society. They led and took over the political scene until the late 1880s. While economy and industry were dominated by the whites, politics was the coloured people's domain. They were more popular than white people and received the support of the black population. This does not mean that all coloured people were interested in politics, but lots of them were. The others had good working positions in administration, education or trading. This group was then placed in the middle of the social hierarchy, between white and black people.

Black people[9] were then at the bottom of the social ladder. They represented the largest community of Martinique population. According to Garaud who made an estimation of the population in the mid-1890s, for 20,000 whites and 50,000 coloured people, there were 100,000 blacks[10]. These figures are not official but they can show the proportion of each ethnic group of Martinique society. Descendants of slaves, black people were the colony's peasants and poor social group. Even if slavery was abolished, they remained in the same working positions. Indeed after 1848, they still worked in sugar cane fields and on plantations. Some of them were also employed in the sugar central factories, which were built during the Second Empire. All these black people ─ men, women

[9] They were different types of blacks. This term does not refer to dark skin colour only. Among black people were light skins such as *chabin* (who have black and white ancestors), *câpresse*, and so on…. By black people, we mean non-whites who do not belong to the class of coloured people.

[10] Garaud, *Trois ans*…, p.201

but also children[11] — formed then the working class of Martinique. Before going further in explaining black workers' conditions, it is necessary to define the term "black".

It is important to make a distinction between black and coloured people. Indeed, the term "black" does not refer to dark skin people only. There are light skin people also among the black community. Hearn, who spent some time in Martinique in the 1880s, witnessed that "at least four or five shades of visible colour are classed as negro".[12] He explained that among them were the dark skin people, those from African lineage, the "chocolate-red skins" also called *capresse*, and the "banana-colored" people called *chabin*[13]. The latest are light skinned people and could be taken for coloured people. However, *chabin* look more like blacks than whites or Métis. They are considered as black because they have more black origins than whites. On the contrary to *chabin*, coloured people look more like whites and have more white descendants. To sum up, non-whites and mixed raced people in whom the predominant element is black are all called blacks.

When slavery was abolished, former slaves became paid workers. At the beginning, workers were paid with what was called *Caïdon*[14]. However by the 1880s, the majority of them were paid with money. Workers had a proper salary instead of having a piece of paper or land and free housing, as planters used to give them after 1848 as a salary. Indeed, when slavery was abolished, the government formed three different types of workers: the *travailleurs cases*, "the colons partiaires", and

[11] Although education became compulsory for children in the colony during the Third Republic,most of them would continue to work on sugar plantations.

[12] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* p.181

[13] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* p.130

[14] The *Caïdon* was created by white planters after the abolition of slavery. The *Caïdon* could be a piece of paper, card, or wood marked with the symbol of the plantation. It could be anything that could be used as vouchers to buy food in the employer's shops.
C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…. p. 30

"the wage labourers" or *gens strangers*[15]. The first group worked for free and lived on plantations, in exchange of a hut and land to grow provisions. According to Renard, "this type of worker increased in number after 1870".[16] The "colons partiaires" used the Metairie system which consisted of being given an area of land by the planter to grow sugar cane, a hut and ground provision. The latter category was made of "workers not normally resident on the plantation but who came to work at crop time for wages".[17] The last system became the most common and successful one in the late Nineteenth Century. The labouring class was then formed of all poor and peasants whose ancestors had been enslaved. The former household slaves became the household servants after 1848. These were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It is important however to underline the difference between these two types of workers. Domestics and craftsmen were mostly found in the two major cities of Martinique ─ Saint-Pierre, the capital of culture and economy until 1902[18], and Fort-de-France, the administrative capital town ─ while field and factory workers remained in the countryside. Both types belonged to the working class of Martinique, and became citizens of the French overseas colony in 1848, as well as in 1870. Women were included in these two categories of workers. Some worked in the fields and others worked in cities as domestics. It is important to take into account the place occupied by women in Martinique society. They played important roles in the events which marked Martinique's history but also in the evolution of the working class.

During the period of slavery black women, who were also enslaved, worked in sugar cane fields or as domestic servants. As men, they tried to resist slavery individually or collectively. As Moitt wrote, "women participated in all aspects of resistance, including armed revolt, *marronnage*, poisoning and

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[15] R. Renard, 'Labour Relations in Martinique and Guadeloupe 1848-1870', H. Beckles and V. Shepherd, *Caribbean Freedom ; Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present* (Markus Weiner Publishers, Princeton, 1996) p.81

[16] R. Renard, *Labour Relations....* p.81

[17] R. Renard, *Labour Relations...* p.81

[18] In 1902, the volcano *La Pelée* exploded and the erruption totally destroyed Saint-Pierre. Fort-de-France became then the capital town of Martinique.

withdrawal of labour through which planters sought to dehumanize them".[19] They kept the same positions and the same role after 1848. Hearn gave many examples of women's works in the 1880s. Those working in sugar cane fields were called *amarreuses*. As a binder, this woman "gathers the canes as they are cut down; binds them with their own tough long leaves into a sort of sheaf, and carries them away on her head".[20] Those who worked in Saint-Pierre were, for instance, servants or *blanchisseuses*[21] — washerwomen. Women were paid with the *Caïdon,* and they lived and worked in the same conditions as black men. As a result, they also participated in all forms of resistance to the capitalist system which tried to keep black people at the lowest social levels. We will then see in this dissertation that women, belonging to the working class, played an important role in the evolution of this social class. They were as involved in all political and social matters as men, even if they did not have the right to vote. However, even if women will be considered in this research, the focus will be on male workers mainly. Indeed, because they were excluded from voting, but also because of the important gap existing between men and women on the gender balance, women were not involved in politics in the same way as men. The role played by women in politics is a topic which must be studied in a different work as it is an important topic which deserves more researches.

If coloured people saw in the third Republic an opportunity to be on the same level as white people in politics, *le nombre*[22] — as they were referred to — did not have the same feeling nor ambition. Electoral politics started in the French colonies after the abolition of slavery. In theory, it was the beginning of a new political life for all coloured and black men. According to Mickaëlla Perina, "on March 4th 1848, the temporary government of the Second Republic decreed that slavery was

[19] B. Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Indiana University Press, 2001), p.150

[20] L. Hearn, *Two Years…*, p.151

[21] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* p.134

[22] They were called *le nombre* by politicians and white people. Souquet-Basiège, a *Béké*, often used this expression in his book.
G. Souquet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race aux Antilles* (1883).

prohibited on all French territories. In that sense, 1848 embodied for most people in the colonies, the beginning of a political and social life based on the assertion of the black man's citizen status".[23] They found themselves in the same situation when citizenship was given to black men with the proclamation of the Third Republic years later. This was supposed to be the beginning of a new era in politics. However, it appears that black people did not start to make any action in mainstream politics before the 1900s. In fact, it seems, when reading general sources on Martinique history, that black people were not interested in mainstream politics until 1900. At the same time, it appears that they participated more in elections from the 1890s[24]. If coloured people started to be involved in mainstream politics as soon as they had citizenship, why did the same not happen for black people too? Did they really stay out of politics as it has been generally accepted, or were they involved in unconventional political actions?

Black people became progressively aware of their political power by the end of the Nineteenth Century. Therefore, in the late Nineteenth Century, black people acted more like active citizens aware of their rights than former slaves enjoying the freedom which had just been given to them. How did they evolve from slaves to citizens then? The focus of this thesis is to understand the process of citizenship awareness in the working black population during the Third Republic, in a prejudice colonial society. Indeed, despite the equality between people that was supposed to be ensured by the Republic, black people were still inferior to coloured and white people after 1870. The abolition of slavery as well as the instauration of the Republic was due to bring Freedom, Equality and Fraternity from the Metropole to the colony. Unfortunately, the colonial system in which the Martiniquan population evolved in was different from France's one. Martinique was a

[23] M. Perina, *Citoyenneté et Sujetion aux Antilles Francophones ; Post-Esclavage et aspiration démocratique* (L'harmattan, 1997), p.16

[24] Looking at the general elections of 1882, 1885, 1898 and 1902 in Saint-Pierre. The figures given by Burand show that more voters participated in elections.

A. Burand, *La Vie politique à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique de 1848 à 1902* (Ibis Rouge Edition, 2002), pp. 138-139, 176

colony in which white people as masters and landowners had a superior status to the rest of the population. Black people, as slaves and belonging to their masters, were then in a position of inferiority compared to their white masters. So when slavery was abolished and the Republic proclaimed, whites, as educated and superior people, did what they could to keep the uneducated and inferior blacks on the lowest level of the social hierarchy. A system of pass and passports was instituted after 1848 in order to control black people's movement on the island but also to force them to keep working on plantations. The domestic passport for instance, "was especially designed for the purpose of preventing inter-communal travel".[25] To rule people's movement and freedom was in opposition with the values given by the Republic. This is the ambiguity of the colonial Republic; on one hand freedom was given to black people, but at the same time they were controlled by their former masters and forced to follow some rules which limited their freedom. They were considered as equal to coloured and white people by the Republic, but the social hierarchy based on skin colour which automatically placed black people at the bottom of this hierarchy was still present. To reuse Périna's words, "the law enforcement is problematic in the French Antilles at this period of time in history, because of white people's obvious will not to recognize equality to black people in their difference." "Slaves, while emancipated, do not have the means to have their rights acknowledged, in the colonies in which the very notion of right does not apply to black people meanwhile the notion of freedom does".[26] How was it possible then for black people to become citizens and to be treated as such by the French Republican society, when the liberty given was limited and, when the society in which they evolved was ruled by the racial prejudice and differentiation, direct consequence of slavery? In spite of the lack of means given to black people by

[25] R. Renard, *Labour Relations*....., p.85
[26] M. Périna, *Citoyenneté et Sujetion*…. p.22

the colonial system, black people became conscious of their political power by the late Nineteenth Century. The process toward this consciousness will be demonstrated in three different chapters.

The first step made by black workers involving them in politics, was made in September 1870, when the Third Republic was proclaimed. Indeed, black people in the south of the island welcomed the Republic with a revolt called the South Insurrection. This revolt was most likely an unorganized revolt made by slaves rather than by citizens. However, if we analyse the testimonies left by some of the insurgents, the trial which followed the revolt and the facts, we can understand that behind this revolt were fairly organized leaders. Both the leaders and the insurgents stood against the racial discrimination made towards black people in the colony. They also stood against the racial superiority of white people, the difference of treatment which existed between whites and blacks, and the double standard of the colonial justice. Indeed, despite the abolition of slavery there was still a racial differentiation made between blacks and whites in Martinique's society and justice. We will then show that the South Insurrection could be considered as the starting point of black workers' process of integration in mainstream politics. This demonstration will be made through three sections. We will first state the facts as the revolt was related to a racial case which happened in the early 1870s. In order to understand the real motives that revolted black workers, we need to know what happened during the insurrection. In a second section we will move to the fight led by both the leaders and the insurgents. This fight was both physical as political. Apparently the leaders had political motives. As for the insurgents, they fought for the same reasons as any former slaves in the Caribbean who aspired to real freedom, equality and justice. We will then finish this chapter by analysing the causes and consequences of the insurgents' failure. Indeed, black people did not win against the government's repressive soldiers who succeeded in putting an end to this revolt. To understand why the insurgents failed in achieving their goal would help to understand their state of

mind in the late 1870s. This will also help to know the political direction black people choose thereafter.

In the second chapter, we will focus on the vision that these black new citizens had on politics. Mainstream politics was shared between coloured and white people. By mainstream politics, we mean governmental and electoral politics. Even if whites and coloured people were in opposition to each other, they used the same means for their propagandas or for their political messages. In the first section we will underline the "political instruments"[27] used by both political parties. In the meantime we will highlight the attitude black people had towards those instruments. We will then attempt to find out if black politicians used the same tools as coloured and white men. This section will end with a paragraph stating the weaknesses that could stop black people— on the contrary to the other category of people— from social and political evolution, such as illiteracy, electoral corruption or white people's control. In another section, we will focus on the political instrument used by black people: the Creole culture. After defining what the Creole culture is, we will precise which aspects of their culture black people used as political instrument, including the Creole language, songs and carnival. In short we will try to understand through this chapter the second stage of black people's integration into mainstream politics, before moving to the last chapter of this dissertation.

In the last chapter we will focus on the strikes organized by black workers from the 1880s. Our focal point will be the general strike made by sugar factories and field workers in 1900. Their demand was a better salary for better living conditions. The strikes show that the labouring class was more active than in 1870 and more conscious of their strength in politics. They became aware of the power they had in politics as the most important pressure group. Furthermore socialism which was newly

[27] A. Burand, *La Vie politique*… p.41

introduced in the island had influence on black workers. We will then see in this chapter how black people became conscious of their power in politics as the working class. In three distinct sections, we will try to explain how they started to take militant actions which exerted pressure on both their employers — most of them were *Békés* — and on politicians. In the first section we will focus on the economic and social reasons which pushed black people to be on strike at many times. Many factors could explain their actions: immigrants' labour competition for jobs, the misery they lived in, the sugar crisis and their working conditions. In the second section we will be concentrating on the demands made by black workers and their consciousness of their citizen status. Indeed, black workers became much more aware of their status of citizen and of the position their social class occupied in the society's hierarchy. It will then be interesting to see how the labouring class moved from the status of "former slaves" to the status of demanding workers. In the last section, we will question the influence the new born socialist party could have on the labouring class. We will thus introduce the socialist movement in Martinique as well as its leader Joseph Lagrosillière.

In order to demonstrate the main point of this dissertation, we will emphasize our arguments using primary but also secondary sources. Primary sources are mainly newspapers' extracts and books published between 1870 and the early Twentieth Century. As for the secondary ones, most of them are books and essays. However, before introducing the main sources used for this work, it is important to underline the difficulties encountered to find these sources: the lack of available sources, and the blast of the volcano *La Pelée*. Indeed, on May 8th, 1902, the volcano exploded and destroyed the town of Saint-Pierre. Saint-Pierre was, as previously mentioned, the capital town of culture and economy of the island. Lots of materials and documents disappeared with the city. It is therefore quite difficult to find primary sources dated before 1902, which could give a precise idea of the social and political atmosphere of Saint-Pierre. However, works have been done by historians to gather information about the post-slavery period. There is still work to do and more researches to

make as many questions are still unanswered. We will then use the information given by those who have worked already on Martinique's politics and on the period covering the Third Republic in Martinique. However, the information given in those sources are not complete; this might be because of the lack of primary sources available in Martinique. It would be then difficult to be accurate in our argumentation as many essential questions stayed unanswered. It is difficult for instance to say the ethnic origins of voters who participated in elections, or who were members or not of the Mutual Aids Associations. Deeper investigations would be necessary to answer those questions, but it would not be easy to find the needed sources. Hence, there will be lots of guessing and hypothesis in this dissertation which will be based on both the primary and secondary sources in our possession.

The main secondary sources that we will use for this dissertation will be: Armand Nicolas' *Histoire de la Martinique Vol.2*[28], a book which underlines Martinique history in general from the abolition of slavery to the Second World War; *La Famille Coloniale*[29], in which Burton reviewed Martinique's history comparing the relationship existing between the colony and France to a familial relationship. We will also use two other books whose authors focused mainly on politics: Adélaïde-Merlande's book[30] which concentrates on the labouring class and the reasons why they made a general strike in 1900; and Albanie Burand's[31], in which every step made in politics in Saint-Pierre before 1902 are explained. These four books build up the basis of our principal sources and our main references among many others. We will also use primary sources such as books dated from the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth. There is Salavina's one[32], a book full of information which also gives an idea of Saint-Pierre before its destruction by *La Pelée*. Salavina was a coloured man who was born

[28] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique de 1848 à 1939*,(L'Harmattan, Paris, 1996)
[29] R. D.E. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale, La Martinique et la Mère Patrie 1789-1992* (L'Harmattan, 1994)
[30] J. Adélaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines du movement ouvrier en Martinique 1870-1900* (Editions Karthala, Paris, 2000)
[31] A. Burand, *La Vie politique à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique de 1848 à 1902*, (Ibis Rouge Edition, 2002)
[32] Salavina, (1909) *Saint-Pierre, La Venise Tropicale (1870-1902)*, (Editions Caribéennes, 1986)

and lived in Saint-Pierre before 1902. Lafcadio Hearn, who spent some time in the West Indies including Martinique in the 1880s, also gives relevant information especially about the colony and its society. His book, *Two Years in the French West Indies*[33] will then be used as one of the main sources of this dissertation too. We will also use Souquiet-Basiège's *Le Préjugé de race aux Antilles Françaises*[34], which is one of the most important sources of the post-slavery period. Indeed, in this book of more than five hundred pages, this *Béké* provided a lot of relevant pieces of information about each important event of the evolution of Martinique's history. The last primary source book used for this writing is Aube's: *La Martinique, son Présent et son Avenir*[35]. The governor provides lots of details about Martinique's economy, society and development. We will then make use of the data left by a coloured man, a *Béké*, a foreigner and a governor. It would have been interesting to use some left by a black person, but no testimonies have been found yet. The analysis and critics made on these writings as well as the comparison made with each of them, enabled us to find the topic of this dissertation. Indeed, it appears that all the authors excluded black people from mainstream politics. When they talk about politics in general and the evolution of politics in Martinique at that time, they refer to the political battles between coloured and white men. It gives the feeling that black people did not belong to the Republican society. The references to the black community are very short. Burton for instance, does not include black people when he relates to politics in Martinique. He sees the black community as a young child who needs his parents to grow up. As a matter of fact, they are not mature enough to be involved in politics. Burand, on the contrary to Burton, in a very short section sees them as an important pressure group. He mainly talks about the evolution of the political parties and the divisions existing between them. Nicolas sees the possibility of a political motive for the South Insurrection, but many questions can be asked when reading his book.

[33] L. Hearn,(1890) *Two Years in the French West Indies* (The Echo Library, 2006)
[34] G. Souqet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race aux Antilles Françaises*, (1883)
[35] Le Contre-Amiral Aube, *La Martinique, son Présent et son Avenir*, (Berger-Levrault et Cie, Paris, 1882)

Adélaïde-Merlande considers that black people started to be involved in politics in 1900 as they made a general strike. He focused on the external reasons which made black workers be on strike, but did not consider the evolution of black workers. These authors do not then uphold the same opinion, but their books, as well as the primary source ones and all the other sources present in the bibliography, will help to strengthen our argumentation. In addition to these books, we will also use other documents such as extracts of newspapers, government reports, police reports, and so on. For the second chapter we will also use songs from the Nineteenth Century. We will analyse these songs in order to show how politics and culture were related to each other. As mentioned earlier, it is not easy to find documents from that period. The troubles encountered to find our primary source documents must be underlined.

Indeed, most sources on Martinique during the Third Republic are kept in the Archives of Martinique. Without criticizing the Archives, one must deplore the fact that the documents listed in their catalogue are often missing. Their opening times during summer are often inconvenient for this researcher. The University's library, where I have found some thesis and books on the labouring class of Guadeloupe, closes as well during this period. The Archives, the University's library and the local one called *Bibliothèque Schoelcher* are the main places to find documents about Martinique's history. I did not unfortunately have a lot of time when I were there and all the sources were not available when I requested them. We will also use therefore some documents that could be found in the National Archives of Aix-en-Provence, where the documents related to the French colonies are stocked. We will thus use documents such as newspapers to see the opinion of people in France about the South Insurrection, strikes or even the evolution of politics in the overseas colonies. In addition, we will use documents related to the socialist movement in France and in Guadeloupe during the early Twentieth Century, as both were connected to the socialist movement in Martinique. Besides, because most of the colonies in which slavery was practised almost have the

same history, I will sometimes make comparison between Martinique and other Caribbean islands to defend my arguments. These are some examples of the investigations made to find the sources necessary to fuel our argumentation in this dissertation. Gathering all the data found, we will then be able to demonstrate that if black people had been excluded from mainstream politics, they progressively manage to build their own political movement according to their working class social status.

Revolt

and

Politics

I. The South Insurrection

1. The facts

2. Roles played by everyone

3. The Motives of the South Insurrection

History has shown that any change in French politics has had consequences on its overseas colonies. After the French Revolution in 1789, for instance, slavery was abolished in Saint-Domingue and then in 1794 by the National Assembly of Guadeloupe. Slavery remained in Martinique as the island was colonized by the English. Napoleon re-established slavery in the French colonies in 1802. Black people, who had been freed for years, did not want to be enslaved again and fought Napoleon's army[36]. In Saint-Domingue, the revolt was so significant that the island was freed from colonization

[36] E. Landi-Marguerite, *La Révolution Française et l'abolition de l'esclavage* in *Esclavages Vol.2* (Conseil Regional de la Martinique, 2002), pp. 12-13

in 1804 and became the Republic of Haiti[37]. Black people rebelled in Guadeloupe as well. Unfortunately the rebels were defeated and slavery was re-established. Slavery was abolished again in 1848 when Napoleon was defeated. Black people saw this event as the beginning of their freedom. It was the first time Martinique black people would be freed from slavery. The Republic was proclaimed in the island in March, and black people were still enslaved. They started to be very agitated in April. They could not wait for the official documents abolishing slavery to arrive on the island. They started to show their impatience burning houses and *Habitations*[38]. In May, a slave called Romain was arrested because he defied his master's order not to play drums. This arrest provoked black people's anger. The May Revolt started then in the whole island. Many people died during this revolt and many Habitations were destroyed. Two days later, on May 22nd 1848, the Governor — forced by the strength of the revolt — abolished slavery in Martinique[39]. The proclamation of the Second Republic and the unfair arrest of Romain were interpreted as signals by black people. They were the signals for the beginning of a new life with freedom and equality. From their point of view, it marked the end of white people's supremacy and the end of their inferiority. The same happened in 1870.

Indeed, the beginning of the Third Republic was marked by an important revolt which was as violent and as significant as the May Revolt. This revolt, called the South Insurrection, was made and led by black and coloured people against whites' supremacy. It had consequences on Martinique society and politics. It defined the political directions each social group took afterwards, as well as the social class they belonged to. The aim of this chapter is to see how revolts could be connected to politics. We will try to show to which extent the South Insurrection was the starting point of black people's move towards citizenship. This chapter will be divided in three different sections. In the

[37] Ibid, p.15

[38] Habitations are *Béké*'s houses. They are usually surrounded by their sugar cane fields, called plantations.

[39] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Vol.1* (L'Harmattan, 1996), pp.388-394

first section we will focus on the facts only. The story of this event is important as it shows the features of Martinique's society in 1870: the racial division, whites' superiority, blacks' inferiority, and the position of coloured people in this society. In the second section, we will see the role played by the insurgents. We will focus on one hand on black people, and on the other hand on the role played by the leaders. To finish, we will question the motives of this insurrection. We will try to understand why black people rebelled and the reasons which made the leaders start this revolt. This chapter will then underline the relationship between revolts and politics as far as black people are concerned.

I. The South Insurrection

Black people in Martinique seemed to be very excited and agitated in September 1870. At the proclamation of the Third Republic the tension existing within the population exploded. This explosion was made in the form of a revolt. This revolt started in the South of the island and hit many towns in this area. It was made but also led by black and coloured people. Among the insurgents were coloured men belonging to the middle class of the social hierarchy, black workers, but also immigrant workers[40]. This revolt, called the South Insurrection, was an important event in Martinique's history because of its origins and its length, but also because of its consequences on Martinique's society and politics. This chapter will then be devoted to this revolt which marked Martinique's history. The insurrection will be analyzed through three different sections. In the first one, we will state the facts only. We will concentrate on the sequences of the event. How and why did it start? What happened during this revolt? Here are the questions we will answer in the first

[40] P. Butel, *Histoire des Antilles Françaises XVIIè-XXè siècles* (Perrin, 2002), p.309
After the abolition of slavery, colonists who became employers, made immigrants come to the island as cheap labour force. We will however come back on this subject in another chapter.

section. We will then move to the role played by the insurgents but also by the leaders of the insurrection. In the last section, we will pay attention to the motives which made the leaders and black workers revolt.

1. The facts

The South Insurrection was much more than a simple revolt organized by the class of black and coloured people of Martinique. Even though it started in September 1870, when the Third Republic was proclaimed, the real story began earlier the same year. Indeed, the story of the South Insurrection began in February 1870 with the *Lubin Case*. To understand why the South Insurrection happened, it is important to understand the *Lubin Case*. Here is the story. On February 19th 1870, a brawl broke out on the road between the towns of Le Marin and La Rivière-Pilote[41]. The two protagonists were Leopold Lubin, a twenty-two year old black farmer coming from a respected black family from South Martinique, and Augier de Maintenon, a white man coming from France who worked for the Navy. This story is important because of its racial characteristic. A black man was confronted by a white one. However, the case is ambiguous as nobody really knows who started the fight. According to Souquiet-Basiège, Lubin provoked the conflict and attacked de Maintenon[42]. Souquet-Basiège was a *Béké*; from this view it is not surprising that he accused Lubin to be responsible for the fight. However according to Nicolas' investigations, Augier de Maintenon and his friend Pellet de Lautrec ─ a Béké who was with de Maintenon during the conflict ─ attacked the black farmer first. He literally said that:

[41] G. Pago, 'L'Insurrection du Sud de la Martinique', *Historial Antillais Vol.4*.
Our information for the summary of the event is based on this essay.

[42] G. Souquet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race*…, pp. 121-123

> "Arrogantly, they called out to this black farmer whose crime was not to salute them and to block the road with his horse while he was supposed to give way to them. The two white men pounced on him, took him aback, and whipped him. All this was to teach him to respect white people."[43]

Whoever started the fight, the result was Lubin's arrest. This led to a racial conflict in Martinique society.

As previously mentioned, the black farmer and the European man had a violent clash on the road. Both made formal complaints against each other without any results. Lubin even unsuccessfully made a formal complain directly to the governor. He made requests to the law, but the governor and judges did not consider his demands but also refused to listen to the testimonies of Lubin's brother, who witnessed the fight. He then decided to take revenge by himself on de Maintenon. On April 25th 1870 Lubin who was waiting for his enemy on his way home, attacked and beat him. De Maintenon was then unable to work for more than twenty days. He made a formal complain. They went to the Court and the trial took place on August 19th. Lubin was sentenced by the Court of Fort-de-France to pay a compensation of a thousand and five hundred francs to his enemy. This represented a lot of money at that time for a farmer. He was also sentenced to five years of hard labour[44]. Lubin's sentence was seen as discriminating and unfair by the Martinique black community. It meant to them that thirty years after the abolition of slavery white people were still privileged over them. As far as blacks were concerned it seemed to be no fair justice in the colonial system. On the opposite, from white people's point of view this arrest and the sentence were legitimate. Souquet-Basiège said that "through violence, black and coloured people believed to recognise the injustice of an era which was already passed".[45] However the facts cannot be denied. Lubin tried unsuccessfully to take legal actions, but nothing happened. On the contrary, when he took the law into his own

[43] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinqiue Vol.2* (L'Harmattan, 1996), p.79
[44] Ibid, p.80
[45] G. Souquet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race*…, p.136

hands he was sentenced for attacking a white man. This story reflected of Martinique society in 1870; black people were still insignificant in front of white people. This case shows that the skin colour was seen as an important feature in the colonial legal system and society. As Nicolas said, this case "illustrated Martinique's society; the farmer against the big owner, the coloured man against the scornful white Sir, the 1848s freed man against the former master who was nostalgic of the great time"[46] of slavery. This racial injustice provoked black people's anger. When the Republic was proclaimed, they thought it was time to react.

Everything went fast. On September 22nd, the governor proclaimed the Third Republic in Fort-de-France, the administrative capital town of the colony. A few hours later, the news arrived in La Rivière-Pilote[47]. In the afternoon, black people started to gather and manifest their disagreement with the Court's decision and this racial injustice made toward Lubin. They cried for white people's death, especially a *Béké* whose name was Codé[48]. Black people's excitement kept growing through the day. At about nine o'clock in the evening Codé's *Habitation* was invaded, looted and burnt. The same evening, many other *Habitations* were burnt as well. From September 22nd to 25th, lots of *Habitations* were burnt by the insurgents in the South of the island. The revolt spread through the South, and Codé was killed on September 24th by the rebels. This was the end of the first step of the Insurrection. Indeed, on September 25th, fifteen towns were besieged[49]. The governor decided to react and start the repression. He called for any volunteers in Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France to join the army force. According to Souquet-Basiège, these volunteers were from "all races, and all social classes".[50] Whites, blacks and coloured people joined the troops, led by *Békés*, to put an end to the

[46] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, P.80

[47] La Rivière-Pilote is a town in South-West Martinique, where the insurrection started.

[48] Codé was the only white victim killed by the insurgents. They wanted him to die because of his well known desire to return to the slavery period. He was also one of those who sentenced Lubin.

[49] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, P.89

[50] G. Souquet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race*…, p.120

insurrection. However, white people seemed to be more enthusiastic than the others. It appeared that white employers took the liberty to enrol their black workers in the troops without their agreements[51]. Those workers had been forced to join the troops otherwise they would have lost their jobs. The fights between troops of repression and rebels made many victims especially on the insurgents' side. It seemed that the battles were unfair; the troops were armed with guns while rebels used cutlasses, weapons made of bamboos and bad hunting guns[52]. The rebels' defeat began on September 26th. Hundreds were imprisoned, few were killed, and as Nicolas said, it was a real "man hunt".[53] The main leaders were arrested and the revolt was over by the very first days of October. This was a short summary of the South Insurrection. This summary shows the state of mind in which black workers were in September 1870. The *Lubin Case* proved to them that they were still considered as not equal to white people. Even though slavery was abolished, they were still not treated in an equal way to white people. They lost the fights against the government's troops, but they stood against the racial differentiation and the discrimination they were victims of in this colonial society. They might have lost their fight because they were less armed than the soldiers, but also because of their lack of organization. As it will be seen later, the insurrection was planned by the leaders, but they did not really organize themselves in case of an eventual repression. We saw in the first section of this chapter the antecedent of the insurrection as well as its first step. What happened then in the following step? How was this revolt led and by whom? Who were the insurgents? Those questions will be answered in the next section of this chapter. Indeed, to understand black people's defeat, it is essential to analyse the roles played by both the insurgents and the leaders of the South Insurrection.

[51]G. Pago, *L'Inusrrection du Sud*…, p.229
[52] Ibid, p.230
[53] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.90

2. Roles Played by Everyone

Black people were involved in the South Insurrection. They were all field or factory workers or farmers. All of them belonged to the working class of the colony. As said earlier, by starting this revolt, those people stood against a racial injustice. They were united in the same cause, and played an important role in this insurrection. All of them— men and women— had a specific role. The leaders had a different role. Indeed, black people did not decide to protest for Lubin's freedom; they just followed those who convinced them that time had come to change things in the colony. The leaders as well as the rest of the insurgents played important roles in this revolt. But what did they do? Who were the leaders and how did they manage to organise this revolt which marked the beginning of the Third Republic?

As previously mentioned, black people protested against the Court's decision to imprison and sentence Lubin to hard labour. According to Nicolas, they already showed their support to Lubin during the trial[54]. They were agitated yet before the proclamation. Nicolas mentioned that the general attorney noticed that in early September there was already a kind of muted excitement in some points of the island. Some threatening words on white people and their properties were spread over the island as well[55]. Black people were then aware of the racial injustice done to Lubin. Their anger became more and more important. This can explain why they easily followed the leaders of the insurrection in late September 1870. Indeed, days before the insurrection, they tried to burn Codé's house, for instance. They succeeded, as already seen, during the insurrection. They also destroyed many other properties. Burton said that "apart from Codé, and someone else, no white owner had been physically attacked; insurgents content themselves with sacking and burning

[54] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.80
[55] Ibid, p. 81

Habitations".[56] Their role was then to destroy and burn *Békés*' properties. Even if they did not organize the insurrection, their role was essential because of the pressure put on the higher social class by the destruction of their properties, their economic power. They spontaneously joined the leaders and were the key elements of the revolt. If they had refused to take part in this rebellion, the South Insurrection would have never happened. Black people were described as spontaneous, violent, naive and impressionable people. For Burand, "the ignorant and naive black mass gets easily impressed by the ambitious and eloquent leaders of the time. Impressionable blacks can be driven to do frightening revolts."[57] As a mass, they can then be violent and dangerous. This violence was shown on Codé's corpse. Souquet-Basiège witnessed that there were marks of cutlass and rocks on Codé's corpse when his body was found.[58] For Burton saw through Codé's death a kind of "ritual mutilation"; "as if it was a collective revenge made on one person for all the humiliations and suffering endured"[59] in the past. It was their violence, their spontaneity and their anger which made black workers the key of the South Insurrection. They acted both as soldiers and as revolting slaves. They followed the leaders as soldiers would obey their superior; and they had the attitude of slaves burning and destroying *Békés*' properties as a mean of protest. Their participation in the South Insurrection was then essential.

Women also played an important role in the South Insurrection. Belonging to the working class, they felt as discriminated as men. They then joined the leaders and the rebels. One of them has even been identified as a leader. Odile Krakovitch, who wrote an article on the role played by women in the South Insurrection, summed up saying that:

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[56] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale ; La Martinique et la Mère patrie 1789-1992* (L'Harmattan, 1994), p.87
[57] A. Burand, *La Vie politique à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique de 1848 à 1902* (Ibis Rouge Editions, 2002), p.24
[58] G. Souquet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de Race*…, p.119
[59] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale*…, p.85

> "Fourteen of those women were sentenced to death, to force labour, or to prison. Some of them, including Lumina Sophie ─ known as Surprise ─ played a leadership role. Others were sentenced for their incendiary and looting activities. Incendiarism, theft, collusion through providing information, poisoning ─ these are *crimes traditionally attributed to women* ... as well as to Blacks."[60]

Women rebelled then as they did during slavery[61]. They appeared to be more radical and cruel than men in this revolt[62]. Their role was then to help with the fight. As men, they burnt *Békés*' properties, and fought the troops of repression. Another example of their tasks was to "fill some bottles with a mixture of crushed pepper and water. Those bottles were then thrown in the soldiers' eyes".[63] Black female workers were not then excluded from the insurrection. They played a role as important as black male insurgents. Some were even considered as leaders during the insurrection. However, there is no evidence that they also organized the insurrection as male leaders did.

The insurrection was led by a group of men, but two were considered as the main leaders: Eugène Lacaille, and Louis Telgard. Lacaille was a coloured man, quite wealthy and landowner but also *"kimboisè"* which means that he was an obeah. Telgard was a black butcher[64]. According to Nicolas, Telgard was the "workers' ankle"─ "*la cheville ouvrière"* ─ of the insurrection since the beginning of its preparation[65]. It means that without him and the work he did to prepare the revolt, the South Insurrection would not have happened. The fact that he was black is important as he could then easily understand black workers' conditions and motivate them. However, he was not a factory worker or a farmer but an independent butcher. During the insurrection Telgard and the other leaders motivated and led the insurgents. They aslo played an important role before the insurrection.

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[60] O. Krakovitch, 'Le Rôle des femmes dans l'Insurrection du Sud de la Martinique en Septembre 1870 ' in *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, n°910, *Les Antillaises*, (1985), p.35

[61] B. Moitt, 'Women and Resistance', *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles 1635-1848* (Indiana University Press, 2001), pp.125-150

[62] O. Krakovitch, *Le Rôle des femmes*…, p.37

[63] G. Pago, *L'Insurrection du Sud*…, p.228

[64] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique…,* p. 98-99

[65] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.100

Indeed, they began to prepare the revolt when Lubin was arrested. According to Nicolas, people started to collect money to pay for an appeal to the Court of Cassation right after Lubin's sentence[66]. We do not have real evidence that the leaders of the revolt belonged to this group of persons, but knowing that the Lubins were well known in La Rivière-Pilote— the Lubins were a family of independent farmers who were very appreciated[67]—, and that they were apparently organizing a revolt, there was a chance that they were involved in this collection. According to Pago, Bolivard who was another leader[68], was responsible for the circulation of the petition in the town[69]. In any case, something was about to happen, and these men had some plans. Reading people's testimonies during the trial, it appears that there were regular meetings at Villard's house[70]. A club, where some meetings were held, was created, and Leonce and Germain were accused of going from town to town to prepare black people for the insurrection. However, there was no real proof confirming these accusations. What the leaders did before the revolt is important as well as their role when the event started.

When the Mayor of La Rivière-Pilote announced the defeat of Napoleon and the beginning of the Third Republic, black people manifested their happiness as well as their anger straight away. They were asking for Lubin's freedom while the mayor tried to calm them down. He was accompanied with many well known and influential black and coloured men, such as Villard[71]. Villard was a teacher, and the most educated man among the leaders. He played the role of mediator between the insurgents and the authorities, even if it was on black people's side. He was however, one of those

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[66] Ibid, p.80

[67] G. Pago, *L'Insurrection du Sud*…, p. 221

[68] Ibid, p. 251.
Six men were considered as leaders: Eugène Lacaille, Louis Telgard, Villard, Germain Jérémie, Bolivard Daniel and Léonce Elise.

[69] Ibid, p. 252.

[70] Ibid, pp.235- 244

[71] G. Pago, L'Insurrection du Sud…, p. 224

whose role was out of the real action, as were Germain, Leonce and Bolivard. Indeed, according to the sources, only Telgard and Lacaille were with the insurgents fighting the government's troops. On September 22nd in the morning, while the proclamation was just made, Telgard went to Lacaille to tell him the time had come to act. Lacaille went to the town centre in the afternoon, accompanied by three hundred people from his neighborhood. Two hours later, he was joined by his friend, Telgard, who arrived with "more then one thousand men and women".[72] They both led the troops of insurgents. Each man had his troops. They encouraged the rebels to burn white people's properties. They were very influential and insurgents did not have trouble to follow them. However, they were not prepared to fight the government's troops. Indeed, when the repression started in the evening of September 24th, Lacaille advised his men to cover their bodies with one of his mixture to protect them against the enemies' bullets[73]. Lacaille and his men were based in the area called La Régale, where Lacaille's house was. They did not attack the troops but waited for them and adopted an offensive strategy. On the contrary to Lacaille, Telgard tried to motivate his men. He invaded a home in the town of Saint-Esprit and prepared his men to face the government's soldiers. Nicolas gave some details about his offensive plan. He said that Telgard made two different rows: those armed with guns were in the ditches along the road while those armed with rocks and the spicy mixture prepared by women, were hidden in sugar cane fields. Unfortunately, Lacaille's and Telgard's troops failed in front of the governor's army. Many were killed and arrested, and a reward was fixed by the governor to the capture of Lacaille and Telgard. Lacaille was arrested on October 1st as well as the other leaders. Telgard was never caught[74].

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[72] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique…,* p. 82

[73] Ibid, p. 88

As we said, he was a kimboizè. Black people's belief in magic and kimboi comes from the period of slavery and their African origins.

[74] G. Pago, *L'Insurrection du sud…,* p. 230

It was then the combination of both the leaders on one side and black workers on the other which made the South Insurrection be so important. Black people's role was to make the revolt animated and alive. Thanks to their anger and their passionate features, the insurrection lasted and hit many towns in Southern Martinique. The revolt would probably not have happened and lasted so long without the participation of black workers. The leaders' role was to prepare the insurrection as well as to make it a success. They started to organize their movement in the beginning of 1870, and saw the *Lubin Case* and the proclamation of the Third Republic as opportunities to execute their plan. We cannot however say that the insurrection was a failure because they lost the battle. As we saw they were not as well armed as the government's soldiers were. However, their actions were not without any consequences on Martinique's politics and on the class of *Békés*. The leaders had a goal to reach while preparing the insurrection, and even if the results were not exactly what they expected, it was positive for a part of Martinique's society. It gave an idea of the political direction that would be chosen in the Third Republic. The motives of both the insurgents and their leaders are important to understand this direction. We will then now focus on the motives that made black people and their leaders start the South Insurrection.

3. The Motives of the South Insurrection

As seen in the previous parts of this chapter, the *Lubin Case* was a reason which could explain the South Insurrection. We can wonder if this case was the only reason which led black people into a revolt. We also know that the leaders started to prepare the insurrection long before September 1870. We also wonder what their motives could have been. Was it just Lubin's unfair arrest or were there other reasons? We will try to answer these questions in this last section.

The Lubin Case and the South Insurrection are linked to each other. The second event resulted from the first one. Not to repeat what has been said, but we will try here to analyse the link existing

between both events. Burton summed up the *Lubin Case*, saying that it was the story of "a black man who stood up to a French white man intimately linked to the white Creoles and found himself with a humiliating condemnation made by a jury formed of white Creoles, including Codé, who clearly showed his "ultra reactionary opinions and an openly desire to return to slavery".[75] Analysing this summary from black workers' view, it is understandable that they had been hurt by this case. It was interpreted as another humiliation made to their community which has been enslaved for years. However, going further in the analysis, we can understand the imperialist and colonial society black people evolved in when this case happened. Indeed, the Lubin Case happened at the end of the Second Empire[76]. During this period, black and coloured people were deprived of all their citizen rights[77]. The social hierarchy was compounded of two levels only: black and coloured people at the bottom, and whites at the top. White people had supreme power: they were supported by the Napoleonic imperialist government, and they were also the only employers of the island. They took many measures to trap black people in a system close to slavery. They were controlled and their freedom was ruled by those measures. They were stuck in the inferior position white people put them in. They were considered as inferior to whites and were treated according to this difference. This is why Lubin was judged and sentenced by white Creoles. This is also why his formal complain was rejected. Knowing these elements, it is easier to understand black people's attitude in September 1870. Tired of the discrimination they were victim of and of their social inferiority, they followed those who encouraged them to revolt against this system in favour of white people. To reuse Burton's idea: "the insurgents did not fight against France as a country but against its imperialism to

[75] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale*…, pp.84-85
[76] The Second Empire corresponds to the Napoleonic Empire between 1852-1870.
[77] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale*…, p.77

which the *Békés*' class identified itself. The insurgents of 1870 did not seem to have nourished any project of independence"[78], on the contrary to the leaders.

The six main leaders ─ Lacaille, Telgard, Vaillard, Germain Jérémie, Léonce Elise and Bolivard Daniel ─ had a bigger ambition than the insurgents. They shared black workers' feelings to be in a discriminating imperial society, but they seemed to have another motive other than revenge. Those who treated of the subject have different opinions of the leaders' motives, but putting them all together help to understand their motives. For Burton, for instance, the insurgents and their leaders had a deep hate for white Creoles and for their power and wealth. This is why they attacked Békés' properties only[79]. The fact that they made the insurgents burn and loot white people's properties means that they wanted to destroy all the means of their wealth. It can also be interpreted as a desire to deprived *Békés* from their power in the economy. In any case, they wanted the end of white people's supremacy and aspired to be on the same economic level than white Creoles. Nicolas goes further in his argumentation. He said that:

> "They were interested in public affairs, they had thought about the problems encountered in the island. Some, such as Lacaille, participated in the liberating Insurrection of May 1848. They agreed with some strong ideas which made in a certain way their objectives: bring the whites to reason by destroying their power in the economy through the confiscation of their big properties and the partition of the lands between poor farmers and land workers; punish the most racist whites..."[80]

Nicolas confirmed then that the leader wanted white people to be equal to the rest of Martinique people. However, he added a new element about the leaders' motives: they did not plan to exclude white people from the colony. The punishment to the most racist is still linked to the desire of equality; but the fact that they would only deprive white people from their goods and lands instead of excluding them show that they would agree to live with them in a non-racist and equal society. In

[78] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale*…, p.86
[79] Ibid, p.87
[80] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.83

Historial Antillais, it appears that the leaders wanted "to force white people as well as coloured men who still supported the Empire, to leave the island whose independence would have been proclaimed, and they would share the lands with their accomplices. Massacres, fire and pillage were the way they would use to succeed".[81] It seemed then that they wanted to be in an independent and republican Martinique. They might have been inspired by the history of Haiti. This idea is confirmed by Nicolas who advanced that Lacaille aspired to live in an independent Martinique and a "Black Republic"[82]. Joining the historians' views all together, we can understand that motives of the leaders of the South Insurrection were politic. They wanted a different status for their island. This means that they wanted Martinique to be an independent Republic, not an imperial colony. Living in a Republic island, Martinique people would be equal to each other with no race or social distinctions. They would not have been as controlled as they were in the Empire, but would have been free. They would have also become citizens. In short, the leaders' motive was a Republican society with all its values: liberty, equality and fraternity.

The South Insurrection was then an important event which marked Martinique's history. It is significant as it started the day the Third Republic was proclaimed, but also because of the consequences it had on Martinique's society and politics. As we saw the leaders, who belonged to the medium class as we would say today, aspired to lots of changes in the colony. They wanted to be as wealthy and powerful as white people. They also wanted to have political power. As for the class of white people, they were obviously against the insurrection. They did not support it, except for Lagrange[83], as we will see later in this chapter. On the contrary, they joined the Governor's side and the troops of repression. This would have some effects on Martinique's political life from the

[81] G. Pago, *L'Insurrection du Sud…,* p.237

[82] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.101

[83] Lagrange was a white man from Saint-Pierre who denounced the racial character of the South Insurrection. He accused white people of racial superiority and supported black people in their cause.

beginning of the Third republic. Indeed, as coloured and black men would become citizens, some political parties would be created and elections would start. However, because of the insurrection, white people would not accept to collaborate with coloured men. There would then be a political scission between white and coloured people right from the beginning. As for black workers, disappointed and disgusted by the end of the trial that followed the insurrection, they would stay out of white and coloured people's mainstream politics as we will see in the next chapter. Even if the South Insurrection looked alike a spontaneous revolt, it had a political characteristic. Indeed, it marked the beginning of black people's move toward politics and citizenship. It was the first time in the Third Republic, black workers acted collectively for a common goal. Their strength as a working class was already there but they would need to go through different other steps to be aware of it. The South Insurrection marked then the beginning of black workers power. Revolts were used by black people as a means to make pressure on the highest class; so as a political instrument. To conclude let us see another case linked to the South Insurrection to show that revolts were a good political instrument.

This case was not about black people, but is as important as the South Insurrection to understand black people's political direction. *L'Affaire Lagrange* — "the Lagrange Case" — is about a white man who witnessed the insurrection in South Martinique and used it to denounce white people's attitude towards blacks in the 1870s. The summary of this case is based on Souquiet-Basiège's work[84]. Although he was one of the *Békés* who did not understand why the insurrection happened, he was alive when both the insurrection and the Lagrange Case happened. When the news of a revolt in the south of the colony arrived in Saint-Pierre — the capital town — Lagrange decided to go there to see exactly what was going on. He left Saint-Pierre with a coloured man called Dorry. Their goal was to request the end of the rebellion by persuading black people to stop the insurrection. They stopped

[84] G. Souquiet-Basiège, *Le Préjugé de race… ,* pp.144-165

in Fort-de-France and left this town with another man, Brother Arthur, a religious man. On their way to Rivière-Pilote, Lagrange got the idea to disguise himself as a religious man as he thought it would have been easier to meet the insurgents in that way. After he arrived in Rivière-Pilote, he met the mayor and other people and started to investigate about the insurrection. Few days later, a pamphlet edited abroad was distributed to Saint-Pierre and provoked a scandal. This pamphlet untitled "*Pétition pour obtenir la grâce des chefs à mort par l'opinion d'une partie de la population.*"— Petition to appeal for clemency on the behalf of the leaders sentenced to death by a part of the population — was written and signed by Lagrange. In this petition, he denounced white people's racism and accused them to be responsible for this insurrection. If they had treated black people right, they would not have been angry and tried to get revenge for all their suffering. What is important in this story is that, when Lagrange was arrested, a crowd of black people started a violent protest, asking for Lagrange's freedom. Because of the pressure made by the black population of Saint-Pierre, Lagrange was freed but expatriated abroad few days later. This story, as well as the South Insurrection, show that black people fought for what they thought was right. With the Third Republic, they expected some social and political changes such as better treatment and equality among people. Even if Lagrange was white, he stood up for a good reason which was right for black people, so they supported him as they did for Lubin. These events had consequences on the direction black workers took in politics during the Third Republic. They would not be directly involved in mainstream politics as they were aware of the divided society in which they lived. They knew they were still considered as totally inferior to white and wealthy coloured people. They would then use instruments proper to them and their black Martiniquan Creole culture to be involved in politics. They would also support any man, what ever his skin colour, whose intentions would be considered as right to black people. We will see in the following chapter what other political instruments black people used and how they could link their culture to politics.

Political Organisation

and

Culture

I. Black People and the "Means" Used in Mainstream Politics

1. Circles, Associations and Societies

2. The Press

II. Politics and the Black "Martiniquan" Culture

1. Creole Culture, Creole Language

2. Songs

3. Carnival

In 1870, while the Third Republic was proclaimed in France and its colonies, every man aged twenty-one and over had the right to vote. Men became legally equal in terms of citizenship. The South Insurrection being over, each class took their political direction, and politics started to animate Martinique people's life. However, it appeared that only the classes of white and coloured people were concerned by politics. They formed Martinique political parties and stood for elections. As seen in the first chapter, coloured people aspired to freedom and equality. As a result, they chose the Republican wing. On the contrary, whites who would lose their supremacy with the laws of the Republic chose the conservative wing. Political battles were then led between the *Békés'*

Conservative Party on one hand and coloured people's Republican Party on the other hand. What about black people then? Were they totally out of politics or did they participate in another way? Looking at the elections' rates, we can see that there was not a high rate of participation from voters. Candidates were always elected after the second round of the elections. The Admiral Aube, who lived in Martinique in the late nineteenth century, literally said that "from a general rule, whatever the assembly to be elected which the suffrage is consulted for, the number of voters is never the one expected, and elections always go to the second round with a number of voters varying from one in ten to one in seven of the voters registered".[85] Few people voted then during elections. Black people formed, however, the largest community of Martinique, but did not vote much. It would have been interesting to investigate on the reasons why black people did not vote much in another work. The fact is that they created no political parties, and they did not participate much in votes. They were excluded from mainstream politics and did not really feel concerned by the general or municipal elections. However, Burand sees them as "a dangerous pressure group" which would have an important influence on politics[86]. If they did not participate in the elections, how could they be influential in politics? If they could exercise pressure on politicians that means they were in a way involved in politics, but in what sense were they involved? An analysis of black workers' attitude toward mainstream politics will help to answer these questions. We are not talking about politics in itself but the instruments used in mainstream politics. According to Burand the two main instruments in mainstream politics were Circles, Societies and Associations on one hand, the press on the other[87]. We will see how those instruments were used by white and coloured people. We will also see whether black workers used those instruments and were involved in any associations or circles. We will also question the approach they had on the press: did they read it and did they write

[85] Aube, *La Martinique, son présent et son avenir*. (1882), p.83
[86] A. Burand, *La Vie politique à Saint-Pierre de la Martinique*, (Ibis Rouge Editions, 2002) p.58
[87] A. Burand, *La Vie politique…,* pp.43-50

articles? Before moving to the second part of the chapter, we will focus on the reaction black workers had when a political party was created for black people only. Did they join the party or did they reject it? In the second part, we will demonstrate that politics were present in black people's culture. We will define the black Martiniquan Creole culture. Thus we will be able to focus on two of its specificities: songs and carnival. The goal is to determine how black people use culture as a political instrument.

I. Black People and the Means Used in Mainstream Politics

As mentioned before, it appears that white and coloured people only were concerned with mainstream politics at the beginning of the Third Republic. By mainstream politics we mean electoral and governmental politics. They used their political instruments as much as possible to communicate with other parties and the population. Nowadays different means of communication are used by politicians such as debates and advertising broadcasted on television or radio for

instance. The modern media however did not yet exist in the 1870s. People had to find other ways to communicate their political programme and ideas. They used the press in which they expressed their ideas through their articles; they also gathered in some circles, societies or associations to discuss politics. Before concentrating on the press, let us first focus on the different types of organisations linked to politics in late nineteenth century Martinique.

1. Circles, Associations and Societies

According to Burand, circles and associations were very important as they represented the places where men and women sharing the same ideas, opinions and values could meet[88]. He gives more details when he literally says that "people gather according to their race in the many existing centres to talk about politics and discuss business"[89]. An important example was *Le Cercle de l'Hermine* created in 1860[90]. Souquet-Basiège said that the members of this private society belonged to the white European race only[91]. Burton also thinks that this circle was exclusively made for white members only. According to him, these people totally rejected the Republic newly introduced in Martinique[92]. Skin colour and political opinions were then the two compulsory criteria to join a circle. Coloured people created theirs according to these criteria. *Le Cercle de la Martinique* was created in 1885, as well as *Egalité*[93]. Both wings had then their own circles, but what about black workers, did they create circles too? We do not have any concrete evidence proving that black people formed some political circles during the whole period of the Third Republic. However, one was apparently

[88] A. Burand, *La Vie politique*…, p.43
[89] Ibid, p.43
[90] Ibid, p.43
[91] G. Souquet-Basiège,(1883), *Le Préjugé de races aux Antilles Françaises* (Desormeaux Editions), p.374
[92] R. Burton, *La Famille Coloniale ; La Martinique et la Mère Patrie, 1789-1992* (L'Harmattan, 1992), p.94
[93] A. Burand, *La Vie politique…,* p.43

created in 1870. The members of *Le Cercle de la Rivière-Pilote* were at the origin of the South Insurrection. According to some testimonies during the trial regarding the Insurrection, this circle was about "dancing, music and fencing"[94], but members also gathered to talk about the *Lubin Case*. We can suppose that the circle was used to organize the South Insurrection. We can also suppose that black people still formed some secrete circles after 1870, but as said before, there is not yet any relevant evidence proving it.

However many associations and societies were created throughout the Third Republic. These associations were in fact Mutual Aids Associations, the "first aim" of which was "to assist the members in case of illness or accident, but also to help in organizing members' funerals".[95] Mutual aid and solidarity were then the first qualities of these associations. They were also black people's qualities. Back in the past, black people used to work and live in groups and helped each other. They gathered according to their locations or the plantations they belonged to. According to Isambert Duriveau who wrote an article on farmers and land working, "farmers worked in society".[96] He also adds that this concept of society was "an intelligent solution thought by people and based on the values of solidarity and mutual aids".[97] It would then be black people's habit to gather in some kind of associations in which work, social and cultural life were shared, which was at the origin of the numbers of Mutual Aid Associations created in Martinique from 1880. In addition, slaves used to create associations which had the same goals as Mutual Aid Associations. Bernard Moitt discovered for instance that:

> "Some of the earliest known slaves associations began in Martinique in 1793, as dance clubs organized along ethnic lines in urban centres. In the nineteenth century they sprang up all over Martinique and broadened their functions and membership to become guilds whose members —

[94] G. Pago, 'L'Insurrection du Sud de la Martinique' in *Historial Antillais Vol.4*.p. 238.
[95] A. Burand, La Vie politique…, p.43
[96] I. Duriveau, 'Gragé moyôk, lasotè et société' in *Le Carnaval, sources, tradition, modernité* (2007, p.38)
[97] Ibid, p.39

> male and female ─ pooled money to hold religious functions and funerals for members...These associations were mutual aid societies whose activities frightened authorities. Planters viewed slave associations, male or female, as vehicles for promoting crimes such as theft and for inciting rebellious behaviour... Their fear was that these groups contained elements who were preparing to massacres whites, as had been done in Saint-Domingue in 1791."[98]

Slaves were then at the origin of the Mutual Aid Associations. If they used these associations to prepare rebellions, we can think that black people also used them in the Third Republic to discuss politics. Nicolas cited some of these associations. Looking at their names, we can notice that they were republican. *Le Progrès* was the first association created in 1882 in Saint-Pierre[99]. There was also *L'Union Républicaine*, *Fraternité*, or even *L'Union des Ouvriers de Saint-Pierre*[100]. Focusing on the latest name quoted, we can understand that this association was for black workers. We do not have lots of information about these associations, their origins and their activities ─ political or not. We know however that they did not have many members as people could not afford the membership fees[101]. In any case we know that black workers kept the slaves' tradition to meet and gather in Mutual Aid Associations. A meeting in one of these associations organized by a worker who would give a political speech was announced in the newspaper *L'Opinion* of July 3rd 1897[102]. This announcement was communicated to those concerned through another political instrument: the press.

2. The Press

The press was, according to Burand, the second main instrument used in mainstream politics[103]. Before 1870, newspapers were used to pass information only; they were the link between the colony,

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[98] B. Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles 1635-1848* (Indiana University Press, 2001), pp.149-150
[99] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Vol.2* (L'Harmattan, 1996), p.121
[100] Ibid, p.121
[101] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique…,* p.122
[102] A. Burand, *La vie politique*…, p.44
[103] Ibid, pp.44-60

France and the rest of the world. The two newspapers of that time were *Les Antilles* and *La Défense Coloniale*, both founded in 1842 and belonging to the plantocracy[104]. However, with the return of the Republic and the law allowing newspapers to be edited without governmental authorisation and fees[105], more and more papers appeared. The role of the press changed then: it was not used just to inform people, but as a mean of propaganda. Indeed, newspapers were linked to political parties. Each party had its own paper and they evolved together in the same time. This meant that newspapers were created and disappeared in the same time as the political party it was attached to. The first newspaper created during the Third Republic was *Les Colonies* in 1878[106]. *La Petite France* appeared in 1885 and *L'Opinion* in 1894[107]. They all belonged to republican parties. *Le Prolétaire* and *La France Coloniale* will be created later by socialists in 1905 and 1906[108]. Burand, whose work focused on Saint-Pierre, and Marlin-Godier who worked on Fort-de-France, both agree that the press, an "irreplaceable"[109] instrument during electoral campaigns, was used as the favourite ground for the most violent political battles[110]. Here is an example of the political fights made through the press, taken in *L'Opinion* of January 26th 1898:

> "Up to yesterday, *Les Colonies*...were promoting popular sovereignty, the benefit attached to universal suffrage. They were fighting aggressively against those who supported the contrary. Today, *Les Colonies* are discarding all a glorious past, rejecting the immortal principles of the human rights and are stating that *the population of Martinique has no awareness of what is good or bad, and is not enlighten enough to apply its judgement*".[111]

We can notice the double function of this article through this extract: to reply to an attack made by *Les Colonies*, but also to discredit it and its political party in the eyes of the voters. We can suppose, as

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[104] M. Marlin-Godier, *Fort-de-France 1884-1914* (Ibis Rouge Edition, 2000), p.77
[105] A. Burand, *La Vie politique*…, p.45
Law of July 29th, 1881.
[106] M. Marlin-Godier, *Fort-de-France*…, p.77
[107] Ibid, p77
[108] M. Marlin-Godier, *Fort-de-France...*, p77
[109] A. Burand, *La Vie politique...,* p.46
[110] M. Marlin-Godier, *Fort-de-France...,* p.76
[111] *L'Opinion*, January 26th 1898.

the article was addressed to voters, that black workers read the news. We assume that some of them could read. However, looking at the high rate of illiteracy among this community, we can understand that most of them could not read or write. Despite the obligation to go to school in the late nineteenth century, three in four children were uneducated in 1900[112]. If children stayed out of schools' education because they had to work, we can guess that their parents were not educated either. But because some of them were, we assume that the educated ones read the news and spread the information around them. If they read the press, workers did not own any newspaper as they did not create a political party. Before concluding the first part of this chapter, let us focus on an example of a political party led by a black man in order to see if skin colour was an important criterion for the black community to support a political leader. It is however important to mention that this black man did not belong to the working class.

Apparently in 1881, a party called "*La Société des Cinquantes Nègres ou le Comité de l'Avenir des Noirs*" ─ literally meaning "The Society of the Fifty Negroes or the Committee for Negroes' Future"─ was founded[113]. According to the address made by the *Comité* of this association for the benefit of Victor Schoelcher, ─ a coloured man at the origin of the abolition of slavery in the French West Indies and fighting for people's equality─ the Society was formed in order to constitute the great black political party of Martinique. Its aim was to "discipline the Martiniquan *negroes*"[114] to protect them and not let them follow the bad principles of coloured people[115]. A black man, François Bernard Célestin, was at the head of this organization. He was also the Mayor of Saint-Pierre until 1881. He had to resign from his position because of the pressure exercised on him by the population and other

[112] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique…,* p.155
[113] Ibid, P.134
[114] V. Schoelcher, *Polémique Coloniale Vol.2*, 1885, p.79
This has been literally translated from French into English : "le grand parti des nègres"
[115] Ibid, p.79

politicians[116]. Unfortunately for this Society, they did not achieve to get at least the fifty members required. As Schoelcher said, this society was "born already dead"[117]. The point here was to show the difficulty to attract the black Martiniquan population in politics and get them involved in a political party, even one created just for them. There might be some reasons explaining why black workers did not join this society. According to Nicolas, Bernard made alliance with white conservatives[118]. Furthermore Schoelcher criticized the fact that the leaders of this organisation wrote in *Békés'* newspaper[119]. This may explain black people's disinterest for this organization in addition to their bad feeling for Bernard, as we will see in the second part of this chapter.

Black workers then seemed not to be directly involved in mainstream politics during the Third Republic. They preferred to stay out of political parties ─even the one made for them─; no legal society or organizations were created by them, and they partly used the press. They were apparently not interested in using the instruments of mainstream politics. They preferred using their own instruments coming from their own black Creole culture, such as, for instance, the informal societies they used to form since slavery to help each others or for carnival. Before seeing black people's instruments in politics, such as music and carnival, let us first define what the black Martiniquan Creole culture was from 1870.

II. Politics and the Black Martiniquan Culture

[116] A. Burand, *La Vie politique…,* p.121
[117] V. Schoelcher, *Polémique Coloniale…,* p.81
[118] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique…,* p.134
[119] V. Schoelcher, *Polémique Coloniale…,* pp.72-75

As we know, Martinique was a former slave colony. French people at that time brought black Africans on the island to be enslaved. Every one kept his own culture, and it is the mixture between the European and the African cultures which formed black people's culture in Martinique. Black Creoles ─ black people born in Martinique─ inherited then a part of their African ancestors' culture mixed to the colons' one. This is why in 1870 they used to speak Creole[120] more than French, and they still played drums to accompany their songs and dances called *"Bèlè"* or *"Biguine"*[121]. They also respected every Christian tradition and celebrated carnival. Black people however used some of these cultural characteristics as political instruments as it will be demonstrated in this section. The most important features were songs and carnival. Before focusing on how black people used carnival to be involved in politics, let us first see how black people used songs ─ mostly sang in Creole ─ and how this could affect politics in Martinique through the Third Republic.

1. Black People's Songs

Singing was one of Martinique black people's main characteristic. It appears, reading Garaud's testimonies of the 1880s, that black people ─ especially women ─ used to sing every time. He said how he enjoyed listening to black women's songs coming from the "*cases*" surrounding his place; they were singing while cleaning their houses.[122] In the same way, Hearn, describing a cane-cutting scene on a plantation, said that behind the workers was the "ka, the drum, ─ with a paid *crieur* or *crieuse* to lead the song".[123] Blacks' singing custom came from their African part of their culture, as well as dancing. According to Garaud, dance fascinated black people too. He added a quotation

[120] Creole Language was born with slavery. It is a mix of French and the languages slaves, coming from Africa, spoke.
[121] L. Hearn, (1889) *Two Years in the French West Indies*, (The Echo Library, 2006), pp.78-79
[122] L. Garaud, *Trois ans à la Martinique,* (1895), p.125
[123] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* p.153

from an unnamed Martinique's governor, saying that "if you wanted to stop a revolt or dissipate a group of black people, just ask some musicians to play their instruments, and soon, they would be followed by black people who would dance behind them".[124] Hearn also talked about these dances. He said that "the old African dances, the *caleinda* and the *bélé* (which latter is accompanied by chanted improvisation) are danced on Sundays to the sound of the drum on almost every plantation in the island" and "the *crieur*, or chanter, is also the leader of the dance".[125] Music was then in black Martiniquan people's blood, and it was during these occasions gathering around music and dances that black people improvised all their famous songs. Any events could inspire them for a new song. Salavina, who lived in Saint-Pierre until the destruction of the town by the volcano, made a description of Creole songs. He literally said that "it was made— as the Creole language— of multiple nuances and of libertine and provocative allusions. It was full of joy, treacherous, sometimes sarcastic, or even cheap in insinuations. For every event, it freshly sprang out from the cobblestones, often made by *"every one"*!"[126] Black Creole's songs were then ironic and sarcastic. Any event could be at the origin of an improvised song, even political events. Jacqueline Rosemain, who worked on music's role in the French Antilles' society, said that "from the time black people became citizens, Creole political songs were born and were quickly spread in Martinique's streets".[127] Black people felt free then to make satirical songs on political events. To mock politics was a way to give their opinions on the subject.

These songs were generally on a *biguine* rythm. *Biguine*, from the English verb "to begin", is a traditional Creole music born from the mix of European music and black people's *bèlè*. Most of the political songs were sung on this musical air. Extract of these songs can be found in different

[124] L. Garaud, *Trois ans…,* p.125
[125] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* pp.78-79
[126] Salavina, (1909), *Saint-Pierre, la Venise Tropicale*, (Editions Caribeennes, 1986), p.251
[127] J. Rosemain, *La Musique dans la société antillaise 1635-1902* (L'Harmattan, 1986), p.143

sources nowadays. Salavina, for instance, dedicated a whole chapter to these songs in *Saint-Pierre, La Venise Tropicale.*[128] Léona Gabriel-Soïme has made important researches to find all the traditional folk songs published in her book[129]; as did Rosemain who analyzed those songs[130]. The same songs are in these books. They are all about the famous political fight between Marius Hurard and Lota in the 1880s. Hurard, a coloured man at the head of the Republican Party and *Les Colonies*, was black people's favourite politician in the 1880s. He established for instance, secular and compulsory education for every child as it is reported in the song *"La Défense kavini folle"*[131]. In this song, black people defended Hurard and attacked the white conservatives and their leader, Lota. Analysing this song, we can see that black people talk about four topics in one. Using metaphors, they explained in the refrain that the Conservative Party, which owned the newspaper *La Défense Coloniale*[132], became crazy because, their leader ─ Doctor Lota ─ was not there anymore to "cure" them. They say in the song that: Hurard asked them not to respond to the provocations made by "*La Défense*", they also thanked him for permitting them to have an education. They made fun of the white Conservatives as Lota was not at the head of the Party anymore. They also criticized the fact that white people had been repeating the same speech for more than twenty years; a speech which was not even in "good French".[133] The latest mockery shows that blacks criticized white people who felt superior because they spoke French while blacks mainly spoke Creole. This example shows how black people expressed their political opinion through songs by supporting their favourite politician while criticizing and mocking his enemies. This example could make one think that black people chose

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[128] Salavina, 'La Chanson Creole', *Saint-Pierre*…, pp. 251-263

[129] L. Gabriel-Soïme, *Ça! C'est la Martinique,* (Sully Cally, re ed. 2007)

[130] J. Rosemain, *La Musique...*

[131] J. Rosemain, *La Musique...,* p. 146
It means in French: "*La Défense devient folle*", which could be translated into English by "The Opposition becomes crazy".

[132] A. Burand, La Vie politique…, p. 48

[133] L. Gabriel-Soïme, *Ça ! c'est…,* p.117
We tried here to sum up and explain each part of the song.

their side based on politicians' skin colour, but it was not the case. Indeed, they looked more at what was made by this person rather than his ethnic origins. They made different songs for instance in which they criticized F. Bernard Célestin— who tried to create the political party for black people only, as mentioned in the first part of this chapter —as they disagreed with his reaction during the affair between Hurard and Lota[134]. In one of their songs called *"Célestin! Roi diable déro"* — meaning Celestine, the king of evil is out, Celestine was his first name — they expressed their disappointment and compared Bernard to the devil for his betrayal[135]. These two examples show that black people used their tradition to sing as a political instrument. Satirical songs, full of the Creole language's metaphors, were then a mean of expression for black people. There are no real evidences on the impact those songs had on politics. However, we can be sure that they were rapidly spread in the island. These songs could build up or destroy someone's reputation. Bernard lost his position, for instance, while Hurard's popularity grew. In any case, black people were then involved in politics every time they created a new song related to political events. As Léo Ursulet said, political songs were as a weapon used by black people in order to express themselves out of ballot boxes[136]. These improvised songs were generally sung during carnival. Carnival was used by the black community of Martinique as a political instrument too.

2. Carnival

[134] A. Burand, *La Vie politique...,* pp.120-121
F.Bernard Célestin was the mayor of Saint-Pierre when the event happened. Black people felt betrayed by Bernard who chose to lie and protect Lota instead of Hurard, in order to stop the conflict.

[135] L. Gabriel-Soïme, *Ça ! c'est…,* p.111

[136] L. Ursulet, 'Le Carnaval de Saint-Pierre' in *Le Carnaval, sources, tradition, modernité*, Les Cahiers du Patrimoines n°23-24 (Conseil Régional de la Martinique, 2007), p. 46

Carnival was meant to be an approximately two-month period of total celebration, fun and joy. In Martinique, carnival used to start in the beginning of January to finish at the eve of Lent. This is how Hearn described this event: "All through the country districts since the first week of January there have been wild festivities every Sunday ─ dancing on the public highways to the pattering of tamtams ─ African dancing, too, such as is never seen in Saint-Pierre".[137] It was, first of all, a period of celebration and enjoyment. People danced, played music and sang. However, behind this appearance of total festivity, was a complete year of preparation and organization made by people, especially black people, who used carnival as a way to pass their political messages to the rest of the population.

Carnival in Martinique lasted longer than anywhere else. It lasted three days while it lasted only two days in Trinidad[138] for instance. However, taking into account all the preparation and organization carnival needed, we could say that it lasted at least two months. Indeed, carnival needed a few months of preparation for the costumes, music and songs, and the creation of "*Vaval*".[139] According to Léo Ursulet carnival was prepared during the whole year "morally and physically". As he said, carnival was first of all, "people's matter"─ people from the low social class[140]. By preparing carnival we mean creating and organising everything which make carnival and which were also used as political tools by black people. The first one was satirical songs.

Most of the satirical songs, including those on politics, were sung during carnival. Crowley who worked on carnival in Trinidad, said that "satirical and more overt insults in song were not exclusive to Trinidad. This can be demonstrated by comparison with Carnival in the French island of

[137] L. Hearn, *Two Years…,* p.112
[138] J. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso, Tradition in the Making* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.110
[139] *Vaval* is the name given to the carnival puppet which is burnt on the last day of carnival, as we will see later.
[140] L. Ursulet, *Le Carnaval…,* p.45

Martinique".[141] Talking about electoral campaigns, Rosemain said that they also continued during carnival[142]. We saw earlier the song on Bernard for instance, a carnival song which is still well known nowadays. Bernard was not the only victim of black people satirical songs. Rosemain also quoted a song on another politician called Lainé. Georges César Lainé was the president of the Colonial Assembly in 1886, mayor of Saint-Pierre in 1887 and elected deputy of the North of Martinique in 1893; he was also closed to Hurard[143]. Both his supporters and his enemy's supporters made songs about him. On one hand there was the song called *"César, Patience!"* in which black people supported his deputy candidature; on the other hand black people who were against him sang *"Diable la ka mandé anti manmaille"* in which they made fun of the politician[144]. The latest song was so popular that nowadays people still sing the refrain during carnival[145]. Black people's songs, whatever the topic, became more and more famous through the years and over the generations. They were sung every year in balls and carnival. The satires were so important, that Lainé forbad songs "in which people were designed, named or in which were included outrageous expressions that would affect the public moral"[146]. This shows the importance of the influence black people's songs could have on Martinique's society and politics. Every single event which happened the previous year could be chosen by black people as a topic for their next satirical song. Even if any one could improvise a song, some of them, especially the ones for carnival, were interpreted by carnival associations' members.

Carnival was indeed led by some associations. Those associations might have been at the origin of the Mutual Aids Associations, as we saw earlier in this chapter. These associations were also called

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[141] J. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay…,* P.110
[142] J. Rosemain, *La Musique…,* p. 143
[143] A. Burand, *La Vie Politique*…, p.162
[144] J. Rosemain, *La Musique…,* pp.149-166
[145] This is based on my own experience of carnival. I know the song myself.
[146] J. Rosemain, *La Musique…,* p.149

Societies. They were responsible for the carnival's music and songs. According to Lyne-Rose Beuze, who wrote an essay on the rivalries between the carnival's societies in Saint-Pierre, "streets were animated, and one could hear the music updated by the rivals' bands".[147] Hearn gives more explanations from his experience of Saint-Pierre's carnival. He says:

> "Simultaneously from north and south, from the Mouillage and the Fort, two immense bands enter the Grande Rue; — the great dancing societies these, — the *Sans-soucis* and the *Intrépides*. They are rivals; they are the composers and singers of those Carnival songs, — cruel satires most often, of which the local meaning is unintelligible to those unacquainted with the incident inspiring the improvisation, — of which the words are too often coarse or obscene, — whose burdens will be caught up and re-echoed through all the burghs of the island. Vile as may be the motive, the satire, the malice, these chants are preserved for generations by the singular beauty of the airs; and the victim of a Carnival song need never hope that his failing or his wrong will be forgotten; it will be sung of long after he is in his grave."[148]

Dancing societies were then enemies during carnival. Similarly, there were bands as well in Trinidad[149]. Knowing that these bands were responsible for the satirical songs, we can guess that they included their political views in these songs. Being rivals, they did not probably have the same opinions. In any case, this opinion was expressed during carnival through songs. Talking about songs of the carnival in Trinidad in 1870, Crowley said that "two in French Creole, are reported to have been sung respectively by the chantwells Hannibal and Zandoli, a third (in English) was performed by Cedric Le Blanc. Similarly, Le Blanc is rumoured to have composed Not a Cent to Buy Rice, critical of contemporary migration by Barbadians."[150] These bands were then responsible for both the music and the songs played during carnival as they were responsible for the creation of *Vaval*, also used as a political instrument.

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[147] L-R. Beuze, 'Le Carnaval de Saint-Pierre : la rivalité des bals et des sociétés carnavalesques' in *Le Carnaval, sources, tradition, modernité* ; Les Cahiers du Patrimoine n° 23-24 (Conseil Régional de la Martinique, 2007), p.54

[148] L. Hearn, *Two years…,* p. 114

[149] J. Crowley, *Carnival, Canboulay…,* p.81

[150] Ibid, p.68

Vaval, as mentioned before, is the carnival's puppet. It is considered as the King of Carnival. It usually represents someone or something which has marked the year which has just ended. That could be taken from any social or political event of the year. Crowley used the carnival of 1881, saying that:

> "There was a parade by a band of masqueraders dressed as police carrying a dummy, representing Baker in funeral procession. Funeral music was provided by an imitation of the police band... strongly reminiscent of the tradition in French speaking Caribbean islands, where an effigy representing an unpopular person, on the spirit of Carnival, is consumed by fire on the first day of Lent."[151]

This tradition started, according to Véronique Elisabeth, at least during the eighteenth century[152]. Carnival normally ends on Shrove Tuesday; in Martinique, however, it ends on the first day of Lent: Ash Wednesday. This comes from the fact that slaves used to celebrate and mourn the end of carnival on Ash Wednesday. They dressed in black and white, they celebrated carnival and, at the end of the day, cried and mourned the death of the *Bois-Bois* which would be burnt. This burning marked the end of this period of joy and excitement; it marked the return to reality[153]. Hearn said about this day that "every year, on the last day of the Carnival, a droll ceremony used to take place called the "Burial of the Bois-bois", — the bois-bois being a dummy, a guy, caricaturing the most unpopular thing in the city life or in politics"[154]. *Vaval* could then represent a politician. There is not any source showing an example of a politician transformed into the Carnival's Bois-bois. However, it still happens today; every year of political elections, *Vaval* represents a politician[155]. To represent a politician as a Bois-bois is the same as making a satirical song about him. In both cases, black people made fun of this person. This was a way to show their political opinion.

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[151] J. Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay…,* p.88

[152] V. Elisabeth, 'Des jours de carnaval', in *Le Carnaval, sources, traditions, modernité* ; Les Cahiers du Patrimoine n°23-24 (Conseil Régional de la Martinique, 2007), p.82

[153] Ibid, p.82

[154] L. Hearn, *Two Years*…, p.117

[155] This is based on my personal experience of carnival in Martinique.

Carnival was then a period of total freedom. It was black people's special moment; their "institutional outlet" as Ursulet said[156]. They could mock Martinique's society and politics in total liberty. It was seriously taken by the black community who waited for it while actively preparing the three Carnival's days. During these days they freely expressed their feelings about politic and politicians, making a doll of the most unappreciated one or singing about him and his party. This does not mean however that when carnival was finished, black people could not express themselves in politics anymore. After carnival, life went on, and black people continued to improvise songs on any subject, even politics.

The analysis made on black workers' attitude toward politics and the political instruments used, leads to the conclusion that black people were involved in politics, but in an informal way. Their social position and their slaves' past did not allow them to use the same tools as white or coloured people in politics. Martinique society was divided in a hierarchy of classes based on the ethnic line. On one hand were the wealthy and literate whites and coloured people; on the other hand were the poor and illiterate black workers, who were bound from liberty few years ago and who had just started to enjoy their freedom. Black people did not dispose of the same political means as the two other groups. They might not use the same Circles or Associations as coloured people or *Békés*, but we have shown that they used to gather in form of societies or associations for mutual aids or for enjoyment, even before 1870. They however used the press, not to pass any messages, but probably to be aware of every political event. They leaned on the instruments used in mainstream politics to be informally involved in politics. Their Creole culture was the main instrument of their informal politics. Black people's heritage from the past was their weapon in politics. By this way, and also because of their number in Martinique's society, they could have an influence on politics, and make pressure on politicians. They had the power to elect someone, and give a good or a bad reputation

[156] L. Ursulet, *Le Carnaval…,* p.49

to this person. They could give their support to politicians or their mockery. In short, even if they were not deeply involved in mainstream politics ─as they did not have any political party or newspapers, and did not pass any bills or laws─ their informal politics were as important as the mainstreams', and even more powerful. They only used another way to be involved in Martinique's politics. However by the late nineteenth century, aware of their misery and of their exploitations by employers, black workers reacted and were more actively involved in politics. The informal politics based on their black Creole culture would become more formal with strikes and unions being organized by them.

To a

Working Class

Movement

I. Social and Economic Reasons of Workers' Strikes

1. Sugar Crisis

2. Indians Labour

3. Poverty

II. Strikes and Demands

1. From Small Strikes to a General One

2. Demands and Results

III. Socialism and the New Socialist Party

1. Joesph Lagrosillière and the Socialist Movement

From the 1880s, political actions undertaken by black workers were different from those taken at the beginning of the Third Republic. Creole culture was still used as a political instrument, but strikes took over revolts. Indeed from the 1880s, Martiniquan workers went on strike at several times. Those small strikes were localised to a place or another and did not last long. Workers usually stopped their work for a couple of days. These strikes were however significant as far as politics was concerned because of the impact they had on employers and politicians, especially *usiniers*[157]. Indeed, white people who stayed out of politics in a general view at the beginning of the Third Republic came back on the political scene from the late 1880s. Surprisingly, they came back with working

[157] *Usinier* is the term used to refer to the class of white *Békés* owning a factory. Those men were the most important employers as sugar cane factory owners, but they were also politicians.

policies in order to ameliorate workers' conditions. According to Darsières, *usiniers* adopted a policy close to socialism in order to gain votes from black voters. He said, for instance, that in order to have their candidates elected for the legislatives elections in 1898, *usiniers* promised to ameliorate both the salary and the living conditions of black workers[158]. Would white people use black workers' demands to achieve their goal in politics? Those demands, used by *Békés*, were the same every time black workers started a strike. Were black workers aware of their conditions and of their political power? These are the questions we will answer in the first parts of this chapter.

Indeed in the first two parts, we will focus on the strikes made by black workers and on their demands. We will first concentrate on the social and economic reasons which made black workers be on strike. Three features can explain the strikes: the sugar crisis in the 1880s, the competition with immigrant workers for jobs, and black people pauperization. These causes will be analysed separately, in different sections. In a second part, we will focus on the strikes made by black workers throughout the Third Republic. We will first see that they started to make small and localised strikes which ended to a general one in 1900. We will pay lots of attention on this general strike as it seems to be at the origin of the working class movement. By working class movement we mean a collective movement made by workers all together as a whole group, sharing the same goal. Still focusing on strikes, we will underline black workers' demands and the results of these demands in a second section. Through these requests, we will highlight the fact that black workers became more conscious of their political strength as the labouring social class but also as voters. This consciousness had consequences on politics as well as we will see in the last part of this chapter.

As we said earlier, white people, coming back on the political scene, tried to influence black workers' votes using different methods which could be considered nowadays as socialist. They might have

[158] C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…, p. 92

taken the idea from the socialist movement which was growing in France but also in Guadeloupe in the late Nineteenth Century. This movement became more and more important, and appeared in Martinique straight after the general strike of February 1900. This is why we will focus in the last part on the socialist movement, direct consequence of the general strike. In the same time, we will see what the socialist leader, Joseph Lagrosillière, did in Martinique after 1900.

I. Social and Economic Reasons of Workers' Strikes

Citizenship and the Republic did not change anything as far as black labourers were concerned. Black people remained during the Third Republic as exploited by their employers and as poor as they were during slavery. They used to revolt during slavery but also in 1870 — as seen in the first chapter — to express their disagreements with their conditions and the fact that they were exploited by the plantocracy. However from the 1880s they used strikes instead of revolts to protest and manifest their feeling and their demands. For what reasons did black workers stop working at several times? What were the external factors which made black workers stop their working activities? Three features can explain these strikes: the sugar crisis known by all the overseas colonies in the Caribbean from the 1880s, immigrants' labour competing with black Creole workers, and black workers' misery. Each one will be analysed in a distinct section starting with the sugar crisis to finish with black people's poverty.

1. Sugar Crisis

Martinique, as well as the other islands in the Caribbean, was a colony where slavery was practiced. Most slaves worked in sugar cane fields. Sugar cane was the main resource of production and the

main resource of the island's economy. However, there were also other products cultivated such as coffee, cocoa, or food-producing; but sugar cane remained the principal farm-product. According to Aube, for instance, in the 1880s there were 19,206 hectares of sugar cane in Martinique, while there were 534 of coffee, 218 of cotton, 698 of cocoa, 32 of tobacco and 13,410 of food-producing[159]. Black workers were the main food producers, as pieces of land were given to them to grow their own food as part of their working contracts. According to Adélaïde-Merlande "even though food production occupied a large area of the land, its commercial value was negligent". [160] This agriculture cannot then be taken into account as far as the island's economy is concerned. Sugar cane was the main farm product which enriched the Caribbean colonies. This is why its production was far more important than others. In British Guiana for instance, "cotton and coffee estates were usually smaller than those devoted to sugar, which became generalized during the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century". [161] Sugar but also rum were produced. They were so important for the Martinique economy that central factories were created during the era of industrialization. The first sugar central factories were created before 1848[162]. However Adelaïde-Merlande states that eleven out of the fifteen central factories which existed in Martinique in 1874 were created between 1868 and 1872[163]. The construction of the eleven factories was due to the creation of the Colonial Credit ― *Crédit Colonial* ―, a public company which was aimed to "a long-term lending of the money necessary for the building of sugar factories in the French colonies or for the renewal and modernization of the equipment of existing sugar factories".[164] The *Crédit Colonial* created in 1860 with a capital of three millions francs, became the Colonial Land Bank ― *Crédit Foncier Colonial* ―

[159] Aube, *La Martinique, son présent, son avenir* (1882), p. 34
[160] J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines du Mouvement Ouvrier en Martinique* (Karthala, 2000), p. 22
[161] W. Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Heinemann educational books, 1981) p.9
[162] According to Nicolas in A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Vol.2* (L'Harmattan, 1996) p.61
[163] J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*… p. 24
[164] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p. 62

with twelve million francs capital three years later[165]. It was then thanks to the financial help given by this public company that the wealthiest *Békés* were able to invest in central factories. There was an important boom in this industry. As Adelaïde-Merlande said, "the creation of central factories had as a consequence to reinforce the tendency of the sugar cane single-crop farming"[166]. *Habitations* and *plantations* were replaced by central factories; the capitalist and industrial system took over the proslavery colonial system. Despite the industrialization of the colony, the island's economy remained on the production of rum and sugar especially. This industry was important until the 1880s. Lots of benefices were made and sugar exportations were great until 1884, not only the year of the beginning of the sugar crisis in Martinique but also in the Caribbean.

From 1884, the exportation of sugar started to decrease. Analyzing a grid made from the data given by Chemin-Dupontès, we can see that the fluctuation of sugar exportation from the French Antilles ─ meaning both Martinique and Guadeloupe ─ was not regular and financially decreasing.

Exportation of Sugar from the French Antilles in Kilograms and Francs[167]

Year	Exportation in Kilograms	Exportation in Francs
1880	79,914,328	48,323,663
1882	105,388,706	60,960,901
1884	74,627,027	40,910,053
1886	66,877,332	22,849,119
1890	81,035,525	29,580,091

[165] Ibid, p. 62

[166] J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, p. 26

[167] This table is made according to the data given by Chemin-Dupontès.
P. Chemin-Dupontès, *Les Petites Antilles : Etude sur leur évolution économique* (1909), p.210-211

1895	59,195,078	16,087,214
1900	62,031,848	24,208,914
1902	75,480,389	22,029,179

Looking at the figures in kilograms, we can see that the rates increased in 1890, 1900 and 1902, but never reached the exportation rate of 1882. As for the financial values, even if some figures rose, we can notice that the rates decrease in general. In 1890 for instance, more sugar was exported than in 1884, but the financial value was much less important than in 1884. This shows that the production of sugar remained significant while the cost of its exportation considerably decreased. If less money were brought into the colony by the sugar exportation it was because of the sugar crisis known by the colony from 1884. This crisis was due to the worldwide sugar overproduction but also to the important competition existing within the overseas colonies. The French Antilles competed with the other Caribbean colonies, but also with other colonies in the world. Beckles and Shepherd explain that "in the post-slavery period, the British-colonised Caribbean had to compete with new producers of cane sugar. This was because sugar plantations developed in colonies in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Cane sugar industries developed in Bengal, Mauritius, Reunion, Java, Fiji, Natal, Queensland and Hawaii."[168] As the British islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe also competed with the colonies cited above. In addition, the islands had to compete with the new producers of beet sugar.

According to Chemin-Dupontès ─ who studied the evolution of Martinique's economy in the early Twentieth Century ─ "the overproduction is caused by an increasing flow of beet sugar year on year, especially produced by Germany, Russia, Austria, France and Belgium, and to a lesser extent by

[168] H. McD Beckles and V.A. Shepherd, *Freedoms Won, Caribbean Emancipations, Ethnicities and Nationhood* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.100

many other European countries and the United-States".[169] Consequently, price sugar dropped because of the increasing production of beet sugar and the overproduction of the cane one. Besides, beet sugar was less expensive than cane sugar, and the taxes set on the exportation of sugar were not in favour of the French Antilles' market. The French government always refused to remove the tariffs on the exportation of sugar coming from the overseas' colonies. However the taxes on those coming from the North were cut off[170]. France, producing beet sugar and penalizing its colonies with taxes, was then Martinique's main opponent. Unfortunately, this crisis had consequences on planters and *usiniers*, but also on their employees. Indeed, the irregularities in the rate of production and sugar exportation provoked an irregularity in black workers' salaries, as we will see later. The sugar crisis emphasized the pauperisation of the working class. However, the salary issue was not due to the sugar crisis only; the competition with immigrant workers on the labour market can also explain the low wages of black workers.

2. Indians Labour

Indians competed with black people on the labour market before but also during the Third Republic. This competition was the result of white people's desire to keep a cheap labour force after the abolition of slavery. Indeed, black people started to run away from sugar cane fields and *Habitations* from 1848. Aube, for instance, quoted an article from 1880 saying that since 1848 in Guadeloupe, "little by little Creole farmers left the sugar cane crop; some became small landowners and produced food, coffee and cocoa, the others having small or no needs, worked a day out of six

[169] P. Chemin-Dupontès, *Les Petites Antilles…,* p.209
[170] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.109

or twelve, but in any case cultivated sugar cane with reluctance as it reminded them of slavery". [171] Black workers in Guadeloupe gave up the fields in general but went back to work only for strict necessity. The same happened in Martinique. Black workers were known for their idleness and their desire not to work in sugar cane fields. This was an issue for the *plantocracy* as they needed people to work on their plantations. They agreed with the solution given by Henry Galos, member of a commission in 1840 which had to analyse the colony's situation if slavery was abolished. In his report, Galos explained that because of black people's reluctance to work ─ as this work reminded them of slavery ─ "we must then expect that the farms in our colonies lose a big part of their staff". "Workshops cannot count anymore on the population which worked for them", "sometimes workforce is large, sometimes it is rare", consequently, "employers, in response to black people's predjudice and also to get them to work harder, will be forced to comply with their requirements and increase their pay." According to him, "the solution would be the introduction of a new breed of workers which would substitute to the former in the agricultural sector or fill in the void left in the factories".[172] To have immigrants as workers would compensate for the lack of labour force, but this would also create a competition between immigrants and black Creoles. The issue of immigrant workers was common to all the Caribbean islands. As Shepherd and Beckles summed up, "the employer class" of the British-Caribbean "and its imperial allies hoped that immigration would build up an extra supply of labourers, lower wages by setting up competition for jobs, provide planters with a steady core of continuous labourers and restore the planters' control over labour".[173] French planters had the same expectations. Immigration started in the British colonies after the abolition of slavery as well. As for the French colonies, the Napoleonic government allowed immigration in the early 1850s.

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[171] *La France Coloniale*, February 2nd 1880 quoted in Aube, *La Martinique*…, p. 39

[172] Aube, *La Martinique*…, p.40

[173] V. Shepherd ; H. Beckles, *Freedoms Won*…, p.50

Most of the immigrant workers came from India. The others were Chinese or Africans. According to Beckles and Shepherd, 143,939 Indians were imported to Trinidad between 1845 and 1917; 42,595 to Guadeloupe between 1854 and 1887; 38,681 to Jamaica between 1848 and 1916; 25,509 to Martinique between 1848 and 1884; and 19,296 to French Guiana between 1853 and 1885[174]. Immigrants in Martinique represented approximately eleven percent of the population between 1863 and 1879[175]. By December 31st 1882, there were 19,143 immigrant workers in the island[176]. There were many more immigrants than white people in Martinique. According to Nicolas, there were about five thousands whites in the colony in the late Nineteenth Century[177]. The number of immigrants brought into the colony kept increasing. Lots were still brought into Martinique even after the decision of the General Council to prohibit immigration in 1885[178]. Immigrant workers were brought in the colonies ─ French and British ─ as indentured servants. They had a one-to-seven-years' contract with their employers. Men's wage was 0,40 francs a day; women earned less. Even if the employers provided house and food to their immigrant employees, immigrant labourers were very poor. These low wages had consequences on black workers' wages. It gave employers the power to pay their black Creole workers with low salaries. The goal of the employers' class to keep controlling the working class and low wages was achieved. This new capitalist system kept black *Martiniquan* workers in a state of misery.

3. Poverty

[174] Ibid, p.59
[175] J. Adélaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines…,* p.74
[176]Ibid, p.74
[177] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p. 151
[178] Ibid, p.60

Black workers' day-to-day life remained as it was before 1870. As for white people, they still ruled the labour market and had power over the working class. In addition to immigration, the Napoleonic government in support to the *plantocracy* passed laws ruling black people's work. The laws, known as the *Gueydon's System*[179], strictly controlled black people's movements in the island, but also black people's freedom. The Gueydon's Decree was at the origin of the *Livret* and *Passport System*. This system forced a black *Martiniquan* to have a pass — the *livret* — and a passport in their possession. All the personal details and the working history of the worker were written down on this *livret*. Black workers had to buy the pass which was compulsory, and had also to have it stamped every year[180]. This pass, as well as the *passport*[181], was aimed to stop black workers' *vagabondage* and force them to "accept contract labour"[182]. Both were designed to enrol black workers and to be sure that they would pay the income taxes put in place by the Governor Gueydon just after the *Livret*[183]. As a result to this system, plus the competition for jobs made by the immigration law, black people were forced to work on sugar cane plantations for low wages. Furthermore, according to Nicolas, their children could not even go to school as their parents had to make them work as well[184]. Consequently, black children could not take any other working direction than sugar cane fields or factories. The *Gueydon's Sytem* and the immigration one kept black workers' families in the same state of misery as it was during slavery. The only difference was that they were not enslaved anymore but paid workers.

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[179] Gueydon was the governor of Martinique at the beginning of the Second Empire. His law was passed on February 13th 1852.

[180] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.43

[181] The Passport was compulsory as well. It completed the Livret, as it was aimed to control the workers' home adresses and their moves within the colony.

[182] H. Beckles; V. Shepherd, *Freedoms Won...*, p.23

[183] A. Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, pp. 46-48

[184] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.46

The *Gueydon's System* engendered a system of payment which also emphasized the exploitation of black workers and their misery. Indeed, black workers were not paid with coins or notes, but with the *Caïdon*[185]. However, each *Habitation* and plantation had their own stamp. This means that the value received on a plantation could not be spent anywhere else than on the plantation and its shops. This system advantaged white people only. By forcing black workers to buy exclusively in their shops, white people exploited their employees twice. They could, as a result, set their own price and take back the value of the salary given to their labourers. All benefits were then for white people. As for black workers, this capitalist system did not help them to become rich but kept them in their deep poverty. Although the system of *Caïdon* disappeared and was replaced by real money by the end of the Nineteenth Century, black workers' poverty remained. They started to react against the capitalist system in which the colony was with strikes and demands.

II. Strikes and Demands

Forced to work for their former masters, and exploited by them, black workers started to react by the late Nineteenth Century. Aware that they were exploited by the wealthiest class of the society, they became more militant. While slaves demonstrated their disagreements with their exploitation by revolts and running away, black workers used strikes. The demands made during those strikes show that black people became aware of their political power as a social class. They knew that to stop working would then put pressure on the employers but also on politicians. This could change their living and working conditions. In a first section, we will focus on the strikes made by black workers. We will see the evolution of those strikes which led to a general one in 1900. In the second and last

[185] See the introduction p.5

section, we will underline the demands made by the labouring class during these strikes and the consequences for them, but also for the employers and politicians.

1. From Small Strikes to a General One.

Many strikes were led and organized by black workers from the early 1880s. The first one was in January 1882 in Sainte-Marie and Trinité, according to Adelaïde-Merlande[186]. They started this strike to be better paid. Apparently "the rumour that the government officially decided to raise salaries at three francs per day, was spread"[187]. Work stopped then for few days. Workers who were on strike had influence on the others and made those continuing to stop work. There were other strikes in 1885 in Le François and Le Robert for instance. Those strikes were led peacefully by black workers who asked for their wage to be raised. There was no real organization among workers, however they used the same process: because of their low salary some of them decided to stop working and influenced the others to stop their activities too. However, these strikes which last for a few days only were localised and specific to a plantation or a factory. No other factories or plantations were affected by the strike which hit the sugar factories in Sainte-Marie and Trinité in the north of the island for example. The same happened in 1885. Only the factory's workers in Le François stopped their activities in January 1885 and in Le Robert in February 1885[188]. However, there was no link between both strikes. These strikes were independent from each other. That means that strikers were concerned only by the wage earned in the factory they worked for, and not by the situation of the other workers in the other factories. However by 1900, black labourers became conscious of the exploitation they were victims of. This consciousness might have been the result of the external

[186] Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, p.105
[187] Ibid, p.105
[188] Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, p.114

influences such as the socialist movement growing in Guadeloupe, and the working class movement which has started already in Europe. The fact that black people made demonstrations in different factories but not at the same time shows that this consciousness was general and common to all black workers. However, they were not aware of the power they could have if they acted collectively as a whole social group. They were not aware of their strength as a labouring class until the big strike of 1900 which hit, this time, many factories in different towns of Martinique.

Reading Adelaïde-Merlande's book [189], we understand that the working class movement in Martinique started with the big strike of 1900. It is also written in an essay of the fourth volume of *Historial Antillais* that "the birth date of the workers' movement in the French Antilles can be set to the 1900s, era of the first big strikes".[190] The strike of 1900 is then important in the history of the working class of Martinique as it marked the beginning of a collective movement led by black workers. The strike started on February 5th, in one of the *Habitations* of Sainte-Marie. Field workers on this *Habitation* refused to work unless their wage rose. The difference between this strike and the previous ones is that this one was not specific to this *Habitation*, but hit many others in the colony. "As identical scenes occur in other nearby habitations, commanders start to think that the strike is the result of a consultation between labourers from several habitations. The formers organized themselves in groups — the classic scenario of a Wildcat Strike — to get workers from further habitations join their movement."[191] Workers in Sainte-Marie then walked from fields to fields to make the other workers stop their work and join the demonstration. In addition, this strike seems to have been planned in advance by workers in North-West Martinique. This is possible as for Adelaïde-Merlande, there were several strikes in this area in January 1900[192]. During these strikes,

[189] Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines….*
[190] 'Les Armes de la Grève', *Historial Antillais Vol.4*, (Société Dajani, 1982) p.377
[191] *Les Armes de la Grève*…, p.380
[192] Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, p.139

workers always demanded an increase in their salary. The fact that they did not get satisfaction to their demands, led black workers make a collective movement which lasted for a few days and hit many plantations everywhere in the colony. Indeed, by the end of the first day work had stopped in the plantations of the towns of Marigot and Trinité[193]. The following day, work stopped in the plantations of Le Lorrain, at the North of Marigot, but also in the area of Le Lamentin, which is in the centre of the island. By February 8th, black workers stopped their jobs in the plantations of Le Robert and Le François, both in South-East Martinique. Unfortunately some of the strikers were killed by the Army in Le François on the same day, but this tragic event did not stop the movement. Indeed, the general strike carried on until the end of the month and was extended in other towns. This strike ended on February 20th and 21st[194]. The most important factor in this strike is the general mobilisation made by the working class to make their demands heard by the higher social classes. They acted together in a non-violent way, and continued in their demarche despite the violent repression made by the army and the government. The general strike of 1900 marked then the beginning of an active and collective movement made by the labouring class of Martinique, for a common goal: a pay rise.

2. Demands and Consequences

The main demand made by strikers was a pay rise. In 1882, for instance, even if the origin of the demonstration was based on a rumour, they asked for an increase in their pay. They expected the same in 1885 and in 1900. Many reasons can explain black workers' desire for a better pay. Salary

[193] Sainte-Marie is located between Marigot in the North and Trinité in the South.

[194] For the evolution of the strike, see Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, pp.143-193

was an issue in the late Nineteenth Century and the measures taken by both the employers and the government created the pauperization of the working class. We saw the effect the sugar crisis and the immigrant labourers had on black workers' wages. Other measures taken by the French government also emphasized this phenomenon of low wages. The law on the customs tariff of 1892, for instance, forced the colonies to trade with France only[195]. This protectionism disadvantaged white planters and employers. They lost the foreign market and had to import their needs from France only. Martinique, for instance, "is obliged to get their factories' equipment from France, paid forty per cent higher than anywhere else".[196] The class of employers cut then the wage of their workers, but also raised the prices of their goods, such as staple products. Besides, the same year Martinique's currency was devalued compared to France[197]. This explains that food prices increased in the late Nineteenth Century. Black workers' wage decreased while the cost of living increased. Unfortunately for the labouring class, employers also took other measures which worsened black people's working conditions and misery. Field workers' task — *la tâche*[198] — became more important in the late Nineteenth Century, and their absences at work were more severely punished[199]. *La tâche* of cane cutting workers was usually of three hundreds cane cut for a franc. In 1900, *la tâche* was about seven hundred or more canes for approximately the same price. During the big strike of 1900 black workers also demanded *la tâche* to be reduced in addition of an increase in their pay. At the end

[195] J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, pp.117-118

[196] Ibid, p.118

[197] Ibid, p.119

[198] It corresponds to the quantity of work made by the field worker in an amount of hours given per day.
J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines…,* p.53

[199] The punishment was to not pay workers if they did not work the whole day, but also if they did not respect the working instructions. This punishment was called *le piquant*.
J. Adelaïde-Merlande, *Les Origines*…, p. 123

of the strike, they got what they asked for. Indeed, field workers obtained from this strike: an increase of fifty per cent in their pay, *La tâche* reduced and the punishments abolished[200].

Strike became a political instrument for the labouring class at the end of the Nineteenth Century. The big strike of 1900 shows the solidarity within the working class, but also the determination and the will of black workers to fight for a better salary. Field workers acted together for the same reason. Aware of their misery but also that they were exploited by white people, they demonstrated for a better pay and a better working condition. Besides the strikers killed by the government's soldiers on the third day of strike field workers continued their demonstrations and did not give up. This strike marked the beginning of the working class fight against the domination and exploitation of the higher social class ─ employers, *usiniers*, *Békés*. This fight was not without social and political consequences. After the strike in 1900, landowners decided to dismiss some of their workers in compensation of the increase in wage of the others. The higher class would find many other means to keep controlling and exploiting the working class. However in politics the strike, which marked the beginning of the organization of the working class as a class, had positive consequences. Indeed, reusing Nicolas' words, "encouraged by their fight and their success, being aware of what the mass action could get, we saw, in many corporations, workers creating trade-unions, right after the end of the strike".[201] It was also at the origin of the apparition of the socialist movement in particular.

III. Socialism and the New Socialist Party

[200] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.158
[201] Ibid, p.162

It is not difficult to make a relationship between the new working class movement and socialism. Indeed, even if the socialist party appeared in Martinique after the strike of 1900, the movement was important already in France, but also in Guadeloupe. "Socialism was introduced in Guadeloupe in 1891"[202]. In fact, the socialist ideology was brought to the Antilles by young men who left their island to study in France and who were influenced by the socialist movement in France. In Guadeloupe, the socialist ideas were brought by a Guyanese man: Edouard-Augustin Nobal in 1891. He created the *Comité de la Jeunesse Républicaine de Point-à-Pitre* ─ the Comity of the Republican Youth of Point-à-Pitre ─ and the newspaper *Le Peuple*, *Organe socialiste des Antilles, Parti Ouvrier Français*. According to Fallope, "the group fought for the emancipation of the black mass, considered to still be enslaved, for the amelioration of its social and political status".[203] Hégésippe Légitimus, a black man who was a member of Nobal's *Comité*, took over and founded the Socialist Party of Guadeloupe as well as its newspaper called *L'Emancipation*. He was elected deputy of Guadeloupe in 1898[204]. The Socialist Party fought for the Guadeloupean workers to become members of trade unions and associations for instance. They also tried to encourage the labourers to create a working class movement in Guadeloupe. If socialism existed in Guadeloupe before the beginning of the strikes and the organization of the working class movement, the opposite happened in Martinique. We could question the influence socialism in Guadeloupe could have on Martinique workers, the news from Guadeloupe was reported in the Martinique press. Black workers in Martinique might have been influenced by the socialist theories from Guadeloupe and France. However, the Socialist Party in Martinique was founded after the strike of 1900, by Joseph Lagrosillière.

[202] J. Fallope, *Esclaves et Citoyens, Les noirs à la Guadeloupe au XIXè siècle* (Société d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1992) p.539
[203] Fallope, *Esclaves et Citoyens*…, p.540
[204] C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…, p.67

1. Joseph Lagrosillière and the Socialist Movement

In the late Nineteenth Century, Joseph Lagrosillière was well known in Martinique even if there was no socialist movement in the island. Indeed, this coloured man was studying law in France when he joined the Socialist Party of Jules Guesdes[205], the *Parti Ouvrier Français* (POF). In the late 1890s, he founded with other personalities of Martinique's political history the *Groupe des Etudiants Socialistes des Antilles* ─ the Antillian Socialist Students' Group. This active group was not indifferent to the workers' situation in the Antilles. Its members, Lagrosillière included, reacted to the injustice committed toward the labouring class by the class of *Békés* and employers. They were also aware that workers were left on their own and that none of the politicians ─ Republican *Mulâtres* or white *usiniers* ─ helped the lowest social classes. The group reacted then when workers were killed by the government's soldiers during the strike of 1900 in the town of Le François. They made a public declaration in Paris called *Un Crime Militaire à la Martinique*[206] ─ A Military Crime in Martinique. In this declaration, they accused and blame the employers and the local government ─ at that time the two deputies of Martinique were white. This massacre was "the odious crime made by a section of employers toward a section of the proletariat"[207]. They thought that the colonial proletariat was linked to the one in France as they were both victims of the capitalist employers. They called then for the help of the socialist groups in France. It is through the press that the Antillian Group related the conditions which the Martinique workers had to work in. At the end, they had the support of the socialists in France to fight for the labouring class of Martinique against the class of employers. The goal of Lagrosillière's group was to make people know how abusive the employers were with the labouring class. They also wanted to establish the socialist movement in Martinique as the

[205] According to Camille Darsières, Jules Guesdes fought for the working classes, against the bourgeoisie and capitalism. C. Darsières, 'Le Pacte avec l'Usine', *Société d'Histoire de la Martinique*, Annales n°28 (10 Juin 1991), p. 90

[206] Published in C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…, pp. 78-79.

[207] Quoted in C. Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière*…, p. 78

proletariat's revenge over the employers[208]. The only means was to create a Labour Party and win the elections. In Martinique, the socialist movement created *Le Prolétaire*, "organ which wanted to be the workers' "mouthpiece"[209]. Joseph Lagrosillière came back to Martinique in 1901 and started his campaign with the mass. Unfortunately, his wife died in Saint-Pierre when the volcano destroyed the city on May 8th, 1902. Lagrosillière left the island, but the socialist movement remained in place and continued to grow. However, he kept fighting for Martinique's workers from abroad. Indeed, after the destruction of Saint-Pierre, the government decided to compensate the victims' relatives. Nevertheless, the higher class helped by the local government, tried to take advantage of this compensation over the labouring class. Joseph Lagrosillière did not hesitate to denounce the situation in 1903 in *La Question de la Martinique*[210]. He said that "sinister workers of Martinique were not molested and only devastated: we can state that the local administration caused the death of many and, encouraged by the central power whose orders were executed, organized— for the account of the capitalist and reactionary factory party — their systematic exploitation".[211] Employers, helped by the administration, forced those who fled the region destroyed by the volcano to work if they wanted to get their compensation. Lagrosillière came back in Martinique in 1906. He became deputy of the North[212] in 1910 and mayor of Sainte-Marie — where the strike of 1900 started — until 1937[213]. We wonder what influence Lagrosillière and the socialist movement had on the labouring class. Looking at the result of elections, Lagrosillière was not elected before 1910. On the social plan, there were more strikes in Martinique: a general one in 1905, and small ones in 1906 and

[208] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*…, p.166
[209] Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière…,* p.151
[210] J. Lagrosillière, *La Question de la Martinique* (le Bigot Frère, 1903)
[211] J. Lagrosillière, *La Question*…, p.2
[212] There were two deputies in Martinique. One for the Northern area, one for the Southern.
[213] Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique...,* p.182

1910[214]. Also in Guadeloupe, there was the first general strike in 1910. This general strike was also the result of different local and small strikes. According to Adelaïde, "to the localized strikes of the period 1900-1910 [...] succeed a huge movement of demands noteworthy by its size [...] the strike of February 1910."[215] As in Martinique the workers' movement started from different localized strikes, for the same motives ─ a pay rise. The only difference is that the socialist movement had started before the strikes. The Socialist Party of Légitimus might have influenced the workers of Guadeloupe but also those in Martinique. Meanwhile, the working class movement born in Martinique in the early 1900s might have influenced the workers' movement in Guadeloupe.

We saw the birth of the working class movement then in this chapter. Black workers united themselves in 1900 to manifest their disagreement with their social conditions. This union was the result of their determination to fight the new capitalist system which was not in their favour. However, on the contrary to 1870, this manifestation was not led as a revolt but as a peaceful strike. Strike was the black workers' instrument which replaced revolts in politics from the 1880s. This evolution shows how black people evolved between 1870 and 1900. They became aware of the pressure they could make on employers and politicians if they acted together as a group. The socialist movement growing in Guadeloupe and France might have been at the origin of the working class self-consciousness. However, putting all the elements together we can see that they were all related to each others. White people's work control added to the sugar crisis and the competition for jobs created by the immigration law emphasized black people's misery. Black workers, probably influenced by the socialist movement abroad, reacted to their poverty putting pressure on the class of employers and demanding a pay rise. The different small strikes made by black workers, led to the strike of 1900. This was the beginning of the working class movement. Because of their solidarity

[214] Ibid, p. 179

[215] J. Adélaïde, *Troubles Sociaux en Guadeloupe de la fin du XIXè au début du XXè siècle 1895-1910*, (Groupe Universitaire de recherche inter-caraïbes, 1971) p.44

and determination, they obtained their pay rise for less work. Nevertheless this strike was just the beginning of black workers' struggle with the plutocracy. Employers continued to try to exploit the labour force of Martinique and they used different means such as blackmailing or unemployment. Black workers continued their active movement to fight the capitalist employers. They formed and joined workers' trade unions and made more strikes.

Conclusion

The issue of this dissertation was to understand the process of integration of black Martiniquans in the new Republican society. Just freed from slavery and relieved of the imperialism of the Second Empire, they had to find their own position in the Martiniquan society and politics. This process of integration in the colonial society and politics was long and hard because of the obstacles put in place by the colonial system. The first step of this integration process was to be conscious of their social class and of the power this position gave them. This consciousness also marked the transition black people made from slaves to workers. Different elements— outside or within their social group — helped them to make this transition. These elements were: citizenship and the other features of the Third Republic, coloured people's upward social and political mobility, the sugar crisis emphasizing black workers' pauperization, and the growing socialist movement outside the colony. Black workers became aware of their social position because of the features of the colonial society and the new capitalist system. Perina demonstrated that in the colonial system the social position was always related to ethnicity[216]. Black people had always been considered and treated as inferior to whites because of their skin colour and origins. Enslaved, then controlled and deprived from total freedom and citizenship during the Second Empire, they have always been kept on the lowest level of the social hierarchy. In that sense, it becomes obvious that black people formed the working class of the Martiniquan society. Their political direction was determined by their social position. They were involved in informal politics which was related to their social position. The politics of this was efficient because of the pressure put on politicians, but also because of the effort made by the latest to gain *le nombre*'s votes. The legacies left by slavery were the strength of the working class movement which continued to grow in the early Twentieth Century.

[216] M, Perina. 'Les theories de la hiérarchie des races et l'organisation sociale.', *Citoyenneté et sujetion aux Antilles francophones* (L'harmattan, 1997), pp. 102-119

The organisation of the working class movement in Martinique was not an easy topic as many questions are still unanswered. About the elections for instance, it would have been interesting to know the percentage of black workers among the voters. Who were they? Were they members of any Circles or Associations? What work did they do? About the strikes and the socialist movement, it would have been interesting to know if black workers planned the strike of 1900 and how. Did the leaders plan and organize themselves as did the leaders of the South Insurrection? What was the real impact of the socialist movement on black workers? Did they share the socialist theories? Many more questions could be asked. However, it has been shown that black people succeeded in finding their position in the colonial society of Martinique. The transition from slaves to workers was then a success. The strike of 1900 and their political movement are the proofs of this success. The characteristic of black Martiniquans' politics came from the transition made during the Third Republic. Indeed, black Martiniquans still used some part of their culture as a political instrument nowadays. Drums, *bèlè,* and songs are still used in strikes, mockeries and satires are still features of carnival, and the abstinence rate in elections is still high. Unfortunately, this black politics still present the same weakness as during the Third Republic: the lack of means and will to fight *Békés*' establishment. If black people were considered equal to white and coloured people, if *Békés* did not have so much power, would black Martiniquans' politics be different?

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